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AN HONORABLE SURRENDER.



# HONORABLE • SURRENDER

MARY ADAMS

*"In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections."*—GEORGE ELIOT.



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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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# AN HONORABLE SURRENDER.

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## I.

“In the spring  
When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,  
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing.”

SHAKSPEARE.

AROUND the village of Unity, lie low and swampy meadow-lands, crossed and recrossed by the many arms of a shallow river that winds its silver threads over their broad surface.

Meadows are like some examples of human worth, — they keep their loveliness for their lovers only. Why should the sight of a stretch of marshes fill and satisfy a beauty-loving soul? Yet he who has seen these lowlands in their fresh green robes, light and shadow under masses of cloud in a spring sky, who has felt the warm sun and cool wind of the May day, and has seen its joy of life visible in every rush and grass of

the meadow, and every ripple of the stream, may have drawn from these tranquil sources a keen and delicate pleasure that retains a singular freshness in the recollection.

It was on such a morning as this that Kenneth Lawrence, standing on the level shore of Unity River, saw a boat, rowed by a girl, slide from under the bridge, and disappear in the upper windings of the stream. When he left the river-side, he took with him a picture of blue sky above, blue water below, and between them the boat, and the young figure bending to its oars. The impression that the meadows made upon Lawrence was that of a great stillness, a pause. He reflected that he had arrived at a pause in his own life.

He was not a remarkable-looking man. He was thirty years old, was obviously a gentleman, was tall and rather lightly built, and had a trick of carrying his head a trifle bent, which, though not a physical grace, saved him from any apparent awkward consciousness of his inches.

He was a "writer of books," and among books of those called novels. He had contrived to astonish that portion of the public whose department in literature was observation and criticism,

and who were more or less actively occupied in looking for the coming American novel, when Mr. Lawrence appeared on the scene with a fine, crisp, delicate style, a subtle, underlying vein of satire, an entire absence of plot, and a cool, direct, minute analysis of character.

In his sketches the incidents were few, the motives of action often insufficient and commonplace rather than heroic, and the atmosphere was not that of romance, but was clear, gray, and reasonable, without being actually realistic. All subjects that he handled were made charming by his deft, accurate touch. In a word, Mr. Lawrence had discovered a vein, and cultivated tastes soon discovered Mr. Lawrence. Critics turned his delicate, highly finished studies over again and again without materially harming them, while the appreciative portion of the public hailed the novel, unhackneyed productions; and when a distinguished English review committed a distinguished blunder, in confounding Mr. Lawrence with a gentleman whose name differed from his as to a vowel in spelling, and, on being corrected, presented its apologies, the American's success was declared complete.

Not that he became popular : that is doubtless a vulgar distinction, and his more fastidious admirers would have been somewhat disgusted had popularity fallen to his share. Yet at times he might have found its attendant prosperity convenient, and an increased income worth the praises of all the critical circle. For in earlier life he had also astonished his family ; and, in this case, the result was not agreeable. The Lawrences were not accustomed to having genius among them. There were Lawrences who were merchants, lawyers, and clergymen. They were eminently respectable, creditable, and successful in whatever they undertook ; but they were not usually brilliant, and they had a natural aversion to brilliancy of any sort, holding that it was specious and shallow. Kenneth's father had been an anomaly, — an unsuccessful Lawrence. In his forty years of life nothing went well with him. He never played a game but he lost it, and never found a path that had not misfortunes at every step. This being John Lawrence's fate, at his death he left to a successful brother his sole legacy, — Kenneth, a little lad of ten.

The brother was a very favorable specimen of



the accepted and approved type of the race, Henry Lawrence of Lawrence & Co., Farborough Iron-works. He was middle-aged, clear-headed, of the honest, obstinate Lawrence temper, with plenty of sturdy, matter-of-fact kindness in his nature, whenever that nature was called upon in language that it understood. He had no sons, a matter of keenest regret to him; and he took his brother's orphan the more willingly because of this, and, because of this, was the more resolved to make Kenneth all that a Lawrence usually was and always should be. It was long before he discovered that he was vainly trying to force a living, resisting nature into a straitened mould wholly unsuited to it; and, when he did make the discovery, his surprise was somewhat pathetic,—supposing pathos to be a possible element in the life of a middle-aged and successful capitalist.

For Kenneth was not, and never could be, a conventional Lawrence.

At fifteen he developed a talent for writing bad verses and ambitious romances,—a talent not adapted to any of his uncle's requirements.

"I can make nothing of him," said Henry Law-

rence ; and he was right enough, for, worse or better, the nature was already formed.

Kenneth, on his part, found the process of moulding severe ; and the years were perhaps as trying to him as they were unsatisfactory to his uncle. A climax was inevitable, but it came in no dramatic form. There was not even an open quarrel ; and when he left his uncle's house, it was with the civillest hand-shake, and with mutual expressions of good-will. Nevertheless he was in no hurry to come back again.

When he was twenty-five he no longer indulged in the verses and romances. He had found his level, and was already writing analytical sketches and studies. Upon this followed five years of such success as has been noted : then came a slight check.

Lawrence made an innovation upon his usual style, and fell under the disapproval of his critics. He was not very seriously disturbed. He had never claimed to be a genius, his conceit not being of the vulgar, grandiloquent sort ; but the change was certainly not agreeable. It was the more awkward for coming in a time of enforced idleness, overtaxed eyes precluding work of a

sort ; and it was too early in the season to visit the mountains in which he was in the habit of spending his holidays.

The event that broke this dead calm was the death of Henry Lawrence.

Kenneth made no particular pretence of sorrow ; but he went down to Farborough with a soft kindliness of feeling for the ugly, substantial house, the plain, sensible mistress and her daughters, and all the old, homely prosperity. And he was not ashamed of the odd, unusual tenderness, as he might have been ashamed ten years before. He had outlived the stoicism he had affected at twenty.

Then there was the reading of the will ; and it was found that Henry Lawrence, who in his whole staid life had astonished no one, was yet capable of surprising his heirs with the maddest of eccentric wills. At least, that was what Kenneth said of it, telling the story in his own way to Davis Baxter, friend and critic to Lawrence, critic in his public capacity as well.

Kenneth was considered the fortunate person. To him had fallen the generous and unexpected legacy. It was, however, a legacy weighted by

conditions, and the terms were certainly very embarrassing to Kenneth.

"I don't at all understand what I am to do with the active management of Farborough Iron-works," he said ruefully. "That is the express condition : there never was a more preposterous one."

The friend removed his cigar, and came up to the perpendicular attitude. "Lawrence," he remarked, "you know as much of iron-works as I do of Sanscrit."

"Exactly," said Lawrence. "Otherwise I should not call my uncle insane."

"You are all right, I dare say. Your management need not be personal. You can be nominally Lawrence of Farborough, actually any thing you like."

"I suppose you know very well I will be nothing of the sort. The case is simple enough. My uncle had no sons, but the iron-works must continue in the Lawrence name. I am a novelist, not a machinist : still, the iron-works. He made a sort of fetich of them, and he proposes that I continue the devotions. It is absurd, if you like. Most things are, from a certain point of view ; but that is no argument. To my mind,

it is plain enough. Either I assume the trust as punctiliously as it was intended ; or I decline the obligations, and the legacy, and walk off in the opposite direction. I don't wish to talk like a prig," he concluded with a slight laugh ; "but it is — a point of honor."

"And so a matter of good taste with you," said the other sardonically.

"Oh ! very well," said Lawrence with creditable good-humor. "That is not the point under discussion. The objection to all this is, that I have a fetich of my own."

"K. Lawrence, Esq., novelist ?"

"Precisely. I deny having any exalted opinion of the fellow ; but, on the other hand, I don't deny having a great regard for him. And I am not equal to the task of managing the machinery of Farborough Iron-works and the machinery of a novel at the same time. Happily, I am aware of the fact, and am not likely to attempt impossibilities."

Here Lawrence took up a pen, and twirled the handle slowly between his fingers.

"I don't like giving up my familiar," he said thoughtfully.

"I think I could resign *my* 'familiar' very cheerfully, in favor of a substantial equivalent."

"So I should have said a week ago. I believe I know most of the discomforts of the trade. Why, Baxter, there is a notch in the edge of my desk that I cannot look at without recalling uncomfortably the hours I have sat staring at it half-frenzied, half-stupefied, hunting a phrase, or grasping at a nebulous idea. Yet here is the substantial equivalent, and still I come back to the notch in my desk."

"You can't take both?"

"Impossible. I should either land Lawrence & Co. in an inextricable muddle, or deteriorate in a literary sense, take to telling situations and popular fiction generally. The combination is absurd."

"I don't see that."

"Ah! but I do," said Lawrence moodily.

"But what are you going to do about it?" urged Baxter.

"Happily, I am not required to do any thing at once," said Lawrence, rising. "I have four months for decision. In the mean time I am going out of town for six weeks to a place called

Unity. Puritanic, colonial sort of name, isn't it? I doubt if it has other attractions; but it will do, I dare say. I remember going there once with my father. He had friends there too, but I have forgotten who they were. I am going out to grass, like Nebuchadnezzar."

"Bring back your wits."

"Or my legacy," laughed Kenneth.

They shook hands on it. Lawrence took an afternoon train out of town, and the next morning stood on the banks of the river, and saw the green meadows in the sun, and the blue of the spring sky.

He was not at all in a mood to appreciate the finer beauties of the spring day, but its influences were not wholly lost upon him; and the following day he came back over the white road, winding down from the village to the bridge, — a staid and sober structure that spanned the main channel of Unity River.

Upon the sides of the bridge little recesses, with peaked, rustic roofs, hung over the stream; and, sitting in one of these, a girl leaned forward upon the rail, and looked up the river. At first sight, it seemed a wonder that she could remain

so motionless in the piercing air. This was a gray day, with purple clouds in the cold sky, and a keen wind that swept the meadows, and cut the dark surface of the water into gleaming, steely furrows.

Then it became a matter of regret that fair possibilities, suggested by a girlish shape, and brown hair coiled low upon her neck, should be turned only upon the unobservant meadows and the chilling wind.

In a second glance, Lawrence saw that the rail upon which she leaned was split, and bent sharply where it joined the upright support, and was likely, at any moment, to precipitate its burden into the water.

He hesitated, but finally said, in his neat, crisp tones, "Pardon me, but you should not lean upon that rail. It is unsafe."

At first she did not reply; and when the answer came it was in a dull tone, and unaccompanied by any movement.

"Thank you. I am not afraid."

"Still I advise you to move," he urged. "You are likely to fall into the river at any moment." At this she moved slightly backward, but without



speaking, or giving her adviser a glimpse of her face ; and Lawrence walked on with an agreeable sense of having been remarkably officious. If he had looked back, he might have seen that she had made her position a degree more dangerous than before ; resting her head on her crossed arms, and leaning more heavily upon the treacherous support.

He had gone but a few yards when a sharp crash, followed by a cry, brought him back on a run. And this was what had happened : the rail of a sudden snapped smartly, and the obstinate person who leaned on it fell forward, but not into the river.

She had caught one of the upright supports, and clung desperately, hanging over the dark, gleaming water.

Well-grown young women are not feather-weights ; but Lawrence was strong, and the girl not more helpless than her position obliged her to be. "Put your foot in that niche," he said briefly. "Now spring a little," grasping her firmly.

In a moment she was standing on the planks of the bridge.

"You are not hurt, I hope?" he said rather breathlessly.

"Thank you, no: I am not hurt."

But she sat down hastily upon the rustic bench, and leaned her elbow on the rail, and her cheek upon her hand.

Lawrence was not aware that he noticed the pure outlines of wrist and throat, the brown mass of hair upon her neck; but he remembered them afterwards.

She was trembling visibly.

"You must not be too much frightened," he said kindly. "There was no great danger."

"Not if it had broken a little sooner, or later? Not if you had not come at all?" looking at him with dilated eyes. They were large eyes, and their long lashes curled upward.

"*If* is an ugly word, why use it?" He was not aware of talking as if to a child. "Actually, there was no harm done. And the river is not deep, I think."

"Six feet under the bridge," said the girl. "And six inches of water above one's head is enough."

She shuddered, and closed her eyes. Her face was absolutely without color.

Lawrence discreetly walked over to the gap, and examined the broken rail.

It was not necessary, for she was not noticing him. Presently he came back again. "You are badly frightened, I'm afraid," he said at last. Pause. "Will you allow me to walk back to the village with you?"

"No, I thank you," she said simply, without moving. Lawrence took another uncomfortable turn, and came back again. "The fact is, I don't at all like leaving you," he said bluntly.

She opened her eyes, and looked at him with a faint gleam of amusement in them. A dimple showed in one smooth cheek.

"I won't jump through the gap," she said, "or break down the rail on the other side."

After a moment she rose to her feet, and inclined her head with a slight, graceful movement. "Good-morning," she said distinctly. There was nothing for Lawrence to do but raise his hat, and walk off in the opposite direction.

"She had a singular manner," he mused, as he went. "Quiet enough, but quiet with an effort; controlled, rather. Not that she was not self-possessed: she was, remarkably so. And there

never was any thing more delicious than her dismissal of me, both the act, and the manner of it. She never entertained the idea of accepting my offer, yet she was too clever to set it down as an impertinence. A strange creature on Unity Bridge."

The unexpected had given a welcome impulse to his colorless day and mood; but, all the same, he was conscious of an unreasonable tingle of annoyance.

He followed the road where it plunged into a belt of willows, whose interlacing shadows, on brighter days, wavered on the white road in dancing shapes of sun and shade; and was nearly through them, when a light, uneven patter of steps, close behind, caused him to turn quickly, and see his late companion, somewhat flushed and breathless after a race that would not have disgraced a schoolboy. Lawrence was profoundly astonished, not to say scandalized; for, in his experience, well-bred young women did not run after strangers.

"I could not help it," she gasped. "I must speak to you. I"—

"Pray don't try to speak yet," he remon-

strated, raising one hand with a deprecating movement.

She stood panting, a transparent color reaching the roots of her hair. "I am behaving very strangely," she said hurriedly; "but I felt that I must tell you I did not intend it. You did not think I intended to fall off the bridge?"

"Surely not," said Lawrence. "I should never have thought of any thing so unlikely." He was struggling with an inward desire to laugh, and the effort he made after self-control made him look detestably solemn and conscious.

"It is unlikely," she said with dignity. "Still you might have thought it, but you would have been mistaken. I only wished to have my way. I don't know why I should have been so unreasonable; but I never intended to fall off the bridge, you must not think it," insistently. "I suppose you will think me insane, at least: I have given you every right to think so."

"Not at all," said Lawrence stoutly. He was very far from being sure of what he ought to say; but he added, "Believe me, I am not thinking any thing you would dislike."

She seemed to resent the attempted consolation.

"You *must* think me very undignified," she said hastily. "I am aware of it, but it could not be helped. I felt that I must speak, or it would always trouble me. Not that I have made any thing better by speaking. And you do not understand: I cannot expect that you should."

"Perhaps I understand better than you suppose," ventured Lawrence.

She did not reply, but repeated the little stately movement of her head, and turned back between the rows of yellow-green willows. Lawrence had the grace not to laugh for full five minutes.

When he came back over the bridge an hour later, he made a small discovery. It was a paper-bound book lying close up to the railing of the bridge. Lawrence decided that it must belong to the young lady who had astonished and amused him earlier in the day. When he took it up, and looked at the title, he raised his eyebrows in some surprise, and said, "Curious!" and then he brought them down again, and scowled, and reflected. "I don't know that it is curious. You can't count on a dead level of rustic simplicity in any of our villages now; and I doubt if there is

a middle link between the primitive being and the young woman who knocks you down with some sort of high-school knowledge. On the whole, I don't know why she shouldn't take to literature of this sort instead of mathematics."

Lawrence was just then forbidden to read, on account of his eyes; and the printed lines were all the more attractive because of this. Besides, the book was familiar to him. He continued to shift the pages, and presently came upon some lines enclosed in pencil that caused him to repeat his muscular exclamations.

"I suppose she fancies that applies to herself. Otherwise she wouldn't enclose it. And so she has ideas about herself, — analytical ideas. Ah! we all have them now, and we are all more or less mistaken. I should prefer her without them, though. Now, I ought to take myself down by suggesting that I am not required to prefer her at all."

By and by he opened the book at the titlepage.

Written diagonally across one of the lower corners was the word "Fairfields," and above it the initials "A. D."

## II.

"He would have passed a pleasant life of it in despite of the Devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together; and that was — a woman."

WASHINGTON IRVING.

THREE white church-spires guarded Unity, and from one of them fell the five solemn strokes that woke Kenneth next morning.

The bell had a peculiarly grave and sober tone. It seemed fitted to be the voice of a serious-minded community.

Lawrence roused himself lazily, and decided that he could not go to sleep again.

He remembered that he had neglected to ask the breakfast hour, and wondered if it would turn out to be six or seven. On the whole, he felt bored.

When he had dressed, and was wide awake, he felt less so. Finally he went out for a walk.



Unity had not much to offer in point of distinct picturesqueness. Kenneth thought the village looked fairly prosperous, but he also thought that he was not accustomed to judge of the prosperity of villages. Possibly he was deluded by the square whiteness of most of the houses, and the ambitious roofs and gables of others.

The front-yards were neatly fenced in, and the fences were very white. The grass inside was of the fresh spring color. The fruit-trees were at the final stage of budding. The vegetable-gardens between the houses showed a great deal of brown earth, dotted and streaked with different shades and shapes of green, in various stages of immaturity.

Kenneth followed one of the streets out of the village limits. There the road wound down a hill into a valley, and, by way of the valley, plunged directly into the outlying meadows. He did not go very far, and turned back without receiving a much more distinct impression than he had been able to get from the square houses and the neat fences. A scene like this relies for its effect upon a sense of familiarity, or of practical use, or upon an unexacting love of nature.

It had no associations for Lawrence. He was entirely ignorant as to what was growing in the vegetable-gardens ; and, though he could rejoice in a clean beach and a bright sea, or a noble outlook from a mountain, he knew nothing about loving a field simply because it was a field.

When he came in he found he had still half an hour to wait for breakfast. He went up to his room, and looked at the book he had found on the bridge. He decided to ask Mrs. Hardy about "Fairfields." Mrs. Hardy was his landlady.

When he went down to breakfast, she was already at the table, clicking the cups together in her thin, nervous hands. She was a small woman, young enough to have a light, girlish figure, and old enough to have some careworn lines in her shrewd, not unpleasing, face. She was not a native of Unity, and seemed to have a lively dislike for place and people, that rather amused Lawrence. She considered that her boarders required to be entertained, especially male boarders. She entertained Lawrence so vigorously that he was rather afraid of her.

He decided not to ask her about "Fairfields ;" but it was a long morning, and by dinner-time he

was glad to fall back upon the slight interest of his question.

He learned that "Fairfields" was on the road leading east from Unity; that it was a white farmhouse, shaded by two great elms at the gate, and standing where the road grew level for a space before plunging into the lowlands and across the causeway.

He also heard something of a story connected with the place, and with the girl he had seen on the bridge.

Some twenty-five years ago, a gay Irishman, Cornelius Dinsmore, arrived in Boston from England, bringing with him a number of pretty talents which had never been of conspicuous use to him, and a collection of pleasant vices which had placed him in various embarrassments. He was a good-looking, pleasant fellow; and there was a kind of magnificence about him that connected his dissipations with the idea of brilliant society and the names of noted European cities, and his ambiguous cleverness with the idea of great latent ability. And then he had the gift of believing in himself, without appearing to take himself seriously.

He was a clever half-amateur in a certain branch of journalism. His regular-correspondent talent was the most notable gift he had; and, for a year or two after his arrival, he worked harder and better than he ever had in his life, and managed to thrive very well.

The second year he went out of town in June; and one evening he got down from the top of a lumbering stage into Unity Main Street, in front of the post-office.

He meant to stay in the village over night. As he walked up the street, the scent of the hay, and of the flowers in the gardens, was sweet in the air, and the long shadows stretched across the road. He met a pretty girl in a blue dress.

He decided to stay a little longer than he had thought at first. He finally staid six weeks, without deciding upon it at all.

He had a pastoral taste; and he liked the hay-making, and the wild roses and elder-flowers, and the June weather.

He adapted himself to simple country-life with a good deal of adroitness, — a faculty he always liked to exercise. He was so comfortable that he began to feel virtuous; and he was so disgusted

with the results of his wild, careless life, that he thought he was sorry for their causes.

And then he fell in love with the girl in the blue dress.

Her name was Ruth Fairfield. She was pretty, and she was twenty years old; but she was the most innocent and undeveloped girl of twenty that Dinsmore had ever seen, and he knew how to appreciate innocence.

There was, however, a serious obstacle to his love-making. Ruth had parents who objected to Dinsmore, not from any great acuteness in judging him, but from a kind of habitual prejudice that was none the more rational for hitting its mark so squarely in this particular case.

Dinsmore felt that it was very irrational, and that he was an injured man, that if such a saving influence as Ruth's had been earlier in his life—Ah! well, it is an old story. He made an effective bit of pathos of his hard case, and was profoundly touched and impressed by it himself. He was quite as sentimental as he was cynical.

And all this time he was meeting Ruth evenings and mornings along the quiet meadow-road. He dazzled her not less with his past wickedness

than with his present goodness, and, most of all, with his repentance, and the power of her influence.

The end was what any one might have foreseen.

Ruth slipped out of the front-door one night, and went down the gravel-path to meet her lover at the gate.

There were rows of sweet, old-fashioned flowers growing beside the path. They may have caught at her skirts as she passed, as if they begged her to stay ; but she never stopped. She met her lover at the gate, and went away with him ; and she came back no more.

After her marriage, very little was known of Ruth in Unity. There were a few who held that she was a fortunate woman, leading a gay life ; and there were others who hinted that she was unhappy, and neglected by her husband : but she never came back to confirm either report.

At the end of ten years she died, leaving a little daughter. Her parents were also dead ; and her sister Eunice had inherited the farmhouse, and the marshy and stony acres, as well as Orthodox principles and convictions of duty. She wrote, offering to take her sister's child.

Dinsmore answered, gracefully enough, that he had decided to place his little Alice in a convent ; and that was a bad blow for Miss Eunice.

But, as it chanced, Alice did not remain in the convent. She said afterwards that she complained to her father that she was not amused ; and, as he could understand this cause of complaint very well, he came and took her away.

By this time Dinsmore had become more restless in his habits. He seldom staid long in any place ; and he kept Alice with him, travelling, from city to city.

For some time she thought this very delightful, and her father the most charming of men.

When she was about sixteen he ceased to be quite so charming to her. He found that as she grew older she was becoming a serious embarrassment ; and, at that time, he had other embarrassments. He was the same Cornelius Dinsmore who came from England disgusted with himself. That winter they spent some time in Boston ; and there Alice met with some cousins who remembered Ruth, and were inclined to pity her daughter. Alice resented the pity ; but the cousins were good people who did not discover this, and

finally they carried their compassion so far as to offer her a home. This time Dinsmore did not refuse. He considered and accepted, and left Alice with regrets that she found it hard to believe.

It was also hard to remain with the cousins. By and by it was impossible. There is still a tradition among them, of a saucy speech she made, concerning Good Samaritans, and her own preference for the priest and the Levite.

She was a wilful girl, and at last there was a quarrel. Then some one remembered Miss Eunice, and her neat house, and her Orthodoxy, and her sense of duty; and Alice was sent to her under something that was very like disgrace.

Nearly four years after, Kenneth Lawrence saw her first on the river-bridge.

Lawrence heard Mrs. Hardy's version of this, and he smoked and meditated over it on the piazza after dinner.

"I am afraid I allowed her to gossip," he concluded. "On the whole, I think I shall allow it again. Tea and gossip make a mild escapade, but I doubt if I can manage any thing better under present circumstances."



He sat looking at the house opposite. Its blinds were closed at every window. It might as well have worn a mask.

The street was vacant as far as it could be seen. A black cat slept on the wall across the road.

Lawrence thought he would return Miss Dinsmore's book. He went into the house, and came out again with the book in his pocket, and his hat on his head.

He found the place without difficulty. Indeed, he had recognized the house Mrs. Hardy described as one of those he had passed in his morning walk.

He went in at the gate, through the spring shadows of the elms.

He pulled the bell at one side of the white door, but it responded only by a faint rattling. The wire was evidently broken. He rapped on the door, and in a moment heard steps coming through the hall.

It was Miss Fairfield who opened the door. Lawrence assured himself that he was not disappointed.

She received the book and his explanation with a kind of bashful ceremony.

When he had finished, she said, "You are Mr. Lawrence, I presume?"

Lawrence acknowledged his identity.

She said, still shyly and stiffly, "I presume you don't know that I used to be acquainted with your father, Mr. Lawrence. Won't you step in?"

Lawrence expressed his pleasure at doing so in a way that made him wonder if her embarrassment was contagious.

This was evidently one of those forgotten friends of his father.

She was an old gentlewoman; but she had so little occasion for formal civilities in her daily life that they had acquired the evident air of disuse. Lawrence imagined them as metaphorically laid away in lavender, and that, when they were brought out of their seclusion, they showed sharp folds, and smelt of the sweet herb. He also had lived in a kind of solitude; and he had a whimsical suspicion that his own manners were of the same sort, but probably more distinctly wrinkled, and less fragrant.

He talked with her for half an hour in her dim, cool parlor. She let enough light in to let him see that the furniture was covered with haircloth.

The sofa was very slippery: he remembered falling off such a sofa when he was a child.

He was on the alert, as usual, for the oddness of the coincidence which brought him there. What had he to do with his father's acquaintance of thirty—no, it must have been nearer forty—years ago? "It is not fate, of course. Fate is dead, or out of fashion; but it is a nineteenth-century imitation."

He had been there some time when Miss Fairfield left him for a few moments, and returned with her niece.

Lawrence saw that the young lady was prettier than he had observed the day before.

She hesitated before shaking hands with him after her aunt's introduction. He made a mental comment: "That is not shyness. It may be aversion, but I think not. It is a different sort of social training. She is more sophisticated than Miss Fairfield and I."

He had to make the most of his impressions, and of a view of her profile, as she sat between him and the window; for she would not talk much.

Her figure was pretty, light and slim but

rounded: her waist and throat and arms, and her small wrists, were all round.

Once or twice, as she turned her face toward him, he was surprised by a look of alert intelligence around the eyes and mouth; but what she said was very ordinary, and without any appearance of forces in reserve.

"I don't think she is a distinct individuality, or even a type," he said, walking up the hill to the village. "In any case, I did not mean to make a study of her. I meant to be"— Here he allowed himself one of the privileges of soliloquy, and paused to select his term. Finally he decided upon "chivalrously obtuse."

## III.

"It was the time of roses ;  
We plucked them as we passed."

THOMAS HOOD.

TIME dragged with Lawrence for two or three days after this. His eyes did not get strong as quickly as he could have wished, so that he was unable to read or write much ; and, in consequence, he very soon got to the end of his resources.

He walked a good deal, and smoked on the piazza, and listened to Mrs. Hardy.

At last he thought of fishing in Unity River ; and, though it was not lively sport, it was a way of passing time.

As he became used to the country, he usually struck across the meadows to the river, instead of following the road. This gave him an unfamiliar back view of the houses he passed. On the side of a hill, on the outskirts of the meadows, he noticed an apple-orchard in full bloom, a mass

of pink and white, on the upward slope. He caught glimpses of a roof he did not recognize above it. The orchard was divided from the meadow by a tumble-down wall.

The second day he saw, from a considerable distance, a blue spot between the wall and the nearest trees. As he came nearer, this proved to be a young lady, who looked up from the book she was reading, and nodded to him. He recognized Miss Dinsmore.

When he came back she was still there, rather to his surprise ; but she did not look up. "That is not indifference : it is determination," he remarked to himself. "She detests me, no doubt ; but she is determined not to go out of her way on my account."

He saw her there so often within the next few days that he gave up the determination theory as rather violent. He was resolved not to be violent in his speculations regarding her.

As the days went on, they came to speaking, and then to chatting, across the wall.

By the time the apple-trees were out of blossom, their acquaintance had progressed considerably. Lawrence was fully accustomed to sitting

on a flat stone in the lowest part of the wall, and talking comfortably with Alice under a tree not a yard away.

At first he was constantly expecting her to revenge upon him the circumstances that attended their first meeting.

"Of course, when she stopped to think it over, she found out how awkward it was. Then she was enraged. And she is a paragon of magnanimity if she ever forgives me her own behavior. She never will. She is sure to take it out of me sooner or later; and, on the whole, I wish she would begin. The delay makes me nervous."

But she failed to show any of the expected malice, and he began to give up this idea also. There was only one thing remarkable about her, and that was the number of ideas she forced him to give up.

Their acquaintance was greatly assisted by that old acquaintance of Miss Eunice and his father which had been dust and ashes so many years. It gave him a position almost as friend of the house, if he had chosen to take advantage of it; which, to do him justice, he did not. It gave Miss Eunice a mild, steady interest in him; and it added the

freedom of her confidence in his individual character, to the freedom which the simple code of her native society and training recognized as natural and almost inevitable.

After he had advanced so far as to call at the house, he ventured upon certain attentions more conspicuously offered to the younger lady. He felt a slight awkwardness in this character that was piquant to him. His summer's amusement was turning out to be of an unusual sort.

He found that there was a presentable light buggy to be had in the village, and there was also a horse, — a large-boned animal of a faded, discouraged-looking sorrel tinge. In Unity most of his race were called colts for an astounding number of years, and Lawrence feared that an animal which had earned the mature title must be tottering on the verge of decrepitude.

He tried him, and found that though his gait was peculiar, — a rising of the hind-quarters that was startling, and an indescribable movement that seemed to portend a back-spring into the buggy, — his pace was bearable.

Lawrence asked Alice to drive with him next day; and, as she accepted, they went then, and



often afterwards. They travelled pleasantly a good many miles behind the faded sorrel.

Other days they rowed on the river. Sometimes they landed at a great rock, some distance up the stream, and did not go back until the shadows were long, and the air cool. Moonlit evenings they walked, sometimes up the village hill, sometimes down to the causeway.

It is needless to say that by this time Lawrence had found out that Alice was a very charming and companionable girl.

All this came about naturally enough. Their acquaintance was as lacking in the characteristics of a flirtation as it was in those of a permanent friendship.

Lawrence accounted for it. "She accepts my attentions because I am the only available young man. Upon my word, I don't mean that in an objectionable sense. So far, I have been discreet : I have been exemplary. I have not even speculated as to whether she is a coquette ; but I suppose I may assume that she likes the society of a civilized being, and it is not gross vanity to indulge the idea that I am a trifle more civilized than her fellow-townsmen."

The days had gone by until it was June. There were warm suns and soft west winds, white ox-eyes in the green fields, and pink wild-roses by the hard smooth roads.

Lawrence found it warm one morning walking down the long hill from the village. From the gate he saw Miss Fairfield's upright, angular figure at the sitting-room window; and he crossed the grass at an angle to speak with her. She sat framed in by the June roses that wreathed the window.

Lawrence chatted from outside. He stood resting his elbow on the sill, and fanning himself with his hat in the other hand.

"It appears to be warm," said Miss Eunice.

He could understand that the heat was little more than an appearance from that cool, half-lit room. He could see the whole dim, neat interior. There were braided mats on the floor. There were several high-backed chairs with cushioned seats, and one great chintz-covered rocking-chair. There was a group of portraits arranged with geometrical precision between the windows at the end of the room.

"Yes, the weather has arrived at that," said he. "It has made attempts for some time."

"It has been dry too," said Miss Eunice, going back to her sewing. "Luther Jones says he doesn't know when he has seen so much of the river-meadows out of water."

"I see that your meadows are high and dry," said Lawrence.

"I don't know as it makes any difference to me," thoughtfully. "I have let them to the Hunts this year. So I don't know as I need to care. And I don't know *but* I do," she concluded, with a touch of the vernacular. "What are you and Alice going to do to-day?"

"I thought of going up the river, if Miss Dinsmore likes the idea."

"She'll go," said Miss Eunice. "She is around the kitchen-door, or the wall, somewhere."

"May I go and find her?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't."

Miss Eunice was accustomed to this free intercourse of young people. She knew not the duties of a chaperone, and her strict conventionalities were all for the guidance of the married portion of the community.

Lawrence found Alice in the doorway of the kitchen, sitting on the threshold, and reading a

book. She looked up, and said "Good-morning ;" and Lawrence sat down on the stone in front of the door. It was a large stone, flat but irregular. The shade of the house fell on this side ; and half the aisles made by the orchard-trees were dark, half bright. The nearest trees were cherries, and their boughs were full of red-and-white fruit.

"Shall we go up the river?" said Kenneth.

"By and by," said Alice. "There's the long day."

She had laid her book beside her on the door-sill. Lawrence took it up, and turned the pages.

"Why do you never talk about what you read, Miss Dinsmore? You let me make an exhibition of myself as much as I like, but I never get at any of your opinions."

"Perhaps I haven't any," said Alice. "No, that is not the reason. Some one told me young ladies must not talk about books."

"Do you like to have those young-lady rules made for you?"

"I don't know that I like rules, but I like customs. It is always fascinating to me to do what other people are doing, no matter what it is."

"What an exaggerated regard for convention!" said Lawrence. "Are you sure it isn't your originality in disguise?"

"Perfectly sure. You had better make the most of it. It is a rare bit of frankness. I suppose I am really very much like a sheep. I like to jump fences when the others do, but not at any other time. Now, there are a great many people walking around this world, and pretending to be lions and eagles and serpents, when they know they belong with the flock, and follow the bell."

"This looks uncommonly like originality," said Lawrence; "but I suppose I am to take your word for what it is."

"I am a tame and conventional soul," said Alice. "You will not need to take my word for that, if you know me long enough."

"Well, I should never have suspected you of it," said Lawrence. He saw his mistake instantly. She sprang up with a flushed, angry, helpless face, and went into the house, without looking at him. He thought, "Now I am in a muddle, and entirely my own fault," and followed her. She was standing by the opposite window.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Dinsmore," he blundered awkwardly. "Upon my word, I didn't mean any thing of the sort."

She turned around and faced him, her color going from red to white, and back again.

"If you did not mean it, why do you beg my pardon? And if you were not thinking of any thing of the sort, how do you know what I am thinking of?" she demanded subtly and unjustly. He looked extremely foolish, and she watched him keenly as he stumbled over some further explanation. By and by she laughed; and he felt submissive enough to join her, if he had dared. She relieved him by going to a closet, and taking out a little basket, which she handed him. "There, go and get some cherries," she said. "We will take lunch, and stay at the rock as long as we like."

Lawrence went out with the basket, thinking, "How a humiliation renews one's youth! I feel about six years old."

When he had filled his basket with cherries, he came back, and stood looking in at the open door. The room was long and low, and the white floor was flecked with sun and shadow from the oppo-

site windows looking to the east. At one end, a great brick-oven gaped like a dusk-red cavern; at the other, a dresser held milk-pans shining like mirrors, and old-fashioned shapes of blue-and-white ware.

Upon a chair, Alice had left her hat and a scarlet shawl.

She came and took the basket of glistening cherries from him, and poured them into a yellow bowl that stood on the table.

Then she disappeared through a narrow door beside the dresser, and came back with a loaf of bread which she set upon the table, and cut with a long knife. The slices fell upon each other white as snow.

She went away a second time, and brought a half-loaf of cake. Then she began to pack the basket, putting in yellow cake and white bread, and bright and dark-red cherries.

Lawrence watched her with a sense of very great charm. He had never wasted any sentiment on his lack of pleasant domestic associations, but it certainly was a long time since he had seen any one cut bread.

"There, it is ready," she said, fastening the

cover ; "but I must go and tell aunt Eunice that we are going to stay all day."

Lawrence waited for her in the doorway.

She came back around the corner of the house, carrying a Japanese sunshade in her hand. He took the lunch-basket from the table.

She followed him into the house, and put on her hat. He took up the scarlet shawl.

"I don't want it," she said.

"You will," he rejoined concisely.

"Then I'll put it on. Oh, no! don't shake it out. Fold it, — this way."

She took it out of his hands, and folded it lengthwise like a scarf, and flung it around her shoulders.

"That has a very pretty effect," said Lawrence.

"That is why I put it on," she said honestly.

As she stepped out on the flat stone, she raised the sunshade, and tilted it over her shoulder. It had a light-blue lining with silver cranes flying over it, and its bamboo canes radiated like a halo behind her head.

They walked across the orchard, out of the solid shadow of the house, into the shadows of the trees shortening toward noon.



They crossed the wall where it was scarcely a foot high. As Alice sprang down, Lawrence released her hand, and said, "Will you let me say something patronizing?"

"Why, of course, when you tell me of it beforehand."

"I liked your telling me why you put the shawl on. It is as pretty as the color."

They walked on a few steps. Alice said, "You would have known, whether I told you or not."

He laughed. "Is that the Puritan conscience? We all have it in this climate."

"No, it is not the Puritan conscience. It is common-sense, I suppose. If you begin by thinking too well of me,—I mean, that I am franker, or cleverer, or somehow nicer, than I really am,—you will end by not thinking as well of me as I deserve; and I should not like that."

They discussed each other's personalities freely in those days. When they were not walking or driving, they almost always went to the rock. It was a great table-like rock, jutting out into the stream. On the shore-side, there was a belt of willows around it down to the water's edge. As Lawrence had said, they did not talk much of

books. They talked of persons; and, if this meant talking of themselves, the circumstances certainly encouraged egotism.

They had the river to themselves, and the meadows to themselves. Sometimes, on especially calm, sunny afternoons, it seemed as if they had the world to themselves.

Lawrence heard a good deal of her antecedents from her own point of view.

He saw that she regretted her gay, undesirable father, and her varying life.

At first he was a little surprised at this; though he thought his surprise unreasonable, and perhaps a little brutal. Why should she not regret her father? Still he was a trifle annoyed.

The next day she told him a story about a bunch of violets that some one gave her, and how she was in disgrace with her father in consequence. Somehow she made him understand that the violets were a solitary instance.

He said to himself, that there was no better guardian for a young girl—even for her simplicity and ignorance—than a man of the world.

Finally his ingenuity constructed a theory that was pleasant to him. He decided that she was

regretting an imaginary father and an imaginary life ; and that, though the barriers which had closed her in had been no better than a sham conventionality and even a sham respectability, still they were barriers, and they *had* closed her in, and had even screened her sight from what was without.

He was certainly a fastidious man ; and fastidiousness seems to be a sort of texture of the soul that may perhaps be worn off by a mental process, comparable to the way in which a delicate skin becomes weather-beaten : yet, upon the whole, it may be doubted whether such treatment is more beneficial to the moral than to the physical complexion.

It may be added, that, in her intercourse with him, Alice had recognized this trait, and, consciously or unconsciously, acted upon it.

## IV.

“Who, after a dry lifetime, . . .  
Was flooded with a passion unaware,  
His whole provisioned and complacent past  
Drowned out from him that moment.”

MRS. BROWNING.

THE next time Lawrence came to Fairfields, he overtook Alice half-way down the hill. She was walking on the right-hand side of the road, and carrying her sunshade tilted down to keep the afternoon sun out of her eyes. She raised it enough to make her nod and smile visible to Lawrence, and then she let him take it from her. He held it in his left hand, and they walked and talked together in its shade.

Lawrence saw that she had more color about her than usual. Presently he made out that she had on a pale-pink cotton dress. Her broad-brimmed hat and her belt were black, and she wore drab lisle gloves that fitted so closely as to show the shape of her finger-nails. She was

certainly a beautiful girl. She had not only her charming figure, and her clear profile, — which was of the delicate, spirited type that is acknowledged as distinctively American, — but coloring perfectly blooming and delicate. Her fair skin was entirely without blemish, except perhaps a few freckles directly under the eyes.

The light-pink tinge in her cheeks was transparent and variable. Her hair was of that sunny light brown that is scarcely darker than blonde. Her gray eyes were very dark, and had, in certain lights, an actual tinge of olive. The lashes were thick even on the under lid.

“Miss Dinsmore,” said Lawrence, “I have brought an idea down with me.”

She laughed outright: “Why, you have always brought an idea with you, — except twice. Once you had a headache; and once you said you had had too much speculative analysis, — whatever that is.”

“This time my idea is a surprise, — surprise at my own ignorance,” said Lawrence. “It is astonishing how near you can live to a thing, and manage to be entirely ignorant of it. Do you know I was never in one of our New-England villages like this before?”

"I don't think that is very strange," said Alice. "I know wherever we went, papa and I, we used to find people who had been over half the continent, without stopping within fifty miles of their own city."

"That is not exactly my case," said Lawrence. "I don't know much about any large portion of the continent, except from the map; and geography is not my strongest point. I have never taken a very liberal allowance of holidays, and several years ago I fell into the habit of going to the Adirondacks summers. When I don't go there, I usually go to the sea. I am like a cat for habits."

"Then, why is it so surprising that you have not been in villages like this?"

"Ah! that is not the real surprise, after all. The surprise is in the impressions I get, or rather in the negative impressions, — those I don't get. You know, there is an ideal New England floating through our literature, and I suppose I had crystallized some notion of a rural community from that. Now, I not only fail to find it, but I fail to find any thing at all like it. If it ever existed, I should say that some vital principle had died

out of it." They walked on a few steps. Whenever he dropped a sentence in this way, Alice let him alone, knowing that he was safe to take it up again within five minutes.

He went on, "Not the industry, for if there is a hard-worked people on the face of the earth!— And yet I haven't seen a single farm that is quite kept up to the old idea of neatness and trimness."

"I dare say that is because so many of the young men go away," said Alice practically. "Very few of the farmers keep their sons at home. And then a great many of the meadow-farms are owned by foreigners, Irish principally, but there are a few Germans and Swedes. Old Mr. Hunt says he don't know but what they get full as much out of the land as any one can, but they don't do it in the old-fashioned way."

"Ah! there is another difference," said Lawrence. "I suppose there is no driving the conceit out of a Yankee; but there is a tradition that some of it used to take refuge in his belief in his church, and his town, and his farm. At present his church is dead; and his vanity and his energy between them manage to drive him out, and leave the farm to the old folks, and the town to the

young women. I don't know exactly what becomes of them: I haven't gone into that branch of the subject."

"Well," said Alice, laughing, "you seem to have gone far enough into the rest of it. A great many of the young women go away too. They teach whenever they can manage to get the training, and, after the training, the school. When they can't, they go to the large factory-towns. I think those who stay at home take music-lessons, and get their fashions from Boston, and make their parties as genteel as they can."

"That is fatal," said Lawrence. "The old, sour, sad, Puritan dread of pleasure was enough of a foe to social enjoyment; but I really believe their modern dread of vulgarity is worse."

Here they turned in at the gate of "Fairfields." Alice took Lawrence into the parlor, where she opened windows and loosened shutters, letting long yellow rays and small bright dots and points of light into the dusky room.

Then she laid her hat on the table, sat down in the rocking-chair, and began to pull off her gloves.

Lawrence sat on the sofa with a certain degré



of precision: he was a person of conventional attitudes.

“Upon my word, their society is becoming a curious spectacle,” he said. “Their old bond and reason for being, Orthodoxy, is dead; and in its place all sorts of crazy hallucinations and superstitions have sprung up, and modern rationalism with them,—the brutish sort, that penetrates in its strange, stolid way, without the aid or the enlightenment of scientific training. And their old social customs, such as they were, are dead. And the young men all leave town, and the young women play the piano.”

Alice laughed, as she laid her gloves on the table. “I shall have to quote Mr. Hunt to you again. He would say, ‘You appear to have studied up consider’ble.’”

“I wonder,” said Lawrence, “whether you will allow me to say, that I have been thinking of all this in relation to you?”

Alice passed one hand over her face from the eyebrows down. She ended by pushing her hair off her right temple and behind the ear.

“What people have to bear, whether they like it or not” — She stopped abruptly, then went

on again: "I suppose I never shall forget the first year, even if I have a chance to forget any of it. Thinking it *could* not last, and finding out that it could and it did.

"Probably there is not much meaning of any sort, to you or any one, in hearing that I have been here since I was sixteen. Well, to me it is tragic: it is all the tragedy there is."

Outside, the afternoon breeze was rising, and the swaying shadow of a bough broke up the even bars of sunlight on the floor. From the hall came the sound of the clock, tick-tack, tick-tack.

"Not that the time has been so long, though it has been long enough: I could bear that. And it is not being so lonely: it is the years I am losing. I could spare them out of my life, — life is long, — but I am losing the only part of it that is worth having. There is no use in telling me that that is a narrow view, a childish view, that I should cease to think so. I know I shall cease to think so: that is exactly what I am afraid of. When I cease to think as I do now, I shall cease to be a girl. I am losing my girlhood. If I could have just the simple, ordinary life that other girls have! I like ordinary things. What I hate is

being placed in an exceptional position. I am beginning to be afraid of growing unlike other people.

"If I could go away and be happy, be amused, as other girls are, — no more!"

She stopped again, and the clock ticked loudly. Lawrence changed his position uneasily.

"I think I must be crazy to go on like this to you," she said finally; "but I have been so lonely, it has lasted so long" — She broke off suddenly, and rushed past him out of the room.

She made very little noise, but the effect upon Lawrence was as violent as if every door in the house had suddenly clapped together in the wind.

He paced the room nervously twice, thrice. He flung himself into one of the straight-backed, inhospitable chairs.

The sunshine lay upon the floor, the branch swayed before the window. The clock ticked, but Lawrence did not notice it: he was busy with an idea that was more insistent than the clock. He was sitting with his back to the door. After several moments some one touched his sleeve. He stood up suddenly, and faced Alice. "Of course I don't mean to go on with this sort of thing,"

she said pleasantly. "Suppose we go out on the river?"

Her face was flushed, but her eyes were bright — brighter than usual.

She was quite honest and natural in recovering her spirits quickly: it was a gift due to youth and her Celtic blood, but it was also due to a wise little rule she had. "Never make people uncomfortable," she reasoned sensibly: "there is nothing more fatal — except to make them ridiculous." She was not more artful in intent than a great many persons who have not her adaptable faculty; but her moral mechanism was rather a complex affair, and when she wished to please, she almost always had a variety of reasonably sincere aspects of her nature from which to choose.

On this day they went down the river.

There the willows grew on the bank, close to the shallow stream. Wild-roses clung to them; vines clothed the rough bark with their shining leaves. A ribbon-like strip of sky was visible overhead; and sunbeams came slanting through them, and fell upon the water.

Alice took off her hat; and some of these golden lights struck into her thick, soft hair.

Lawrence rested on his oars; and there was the sound of their dripping, and of the wind in the belt of willows, — a sound like a loud whisper.

“There is something more than familiar in this,” said Lawrence. “It gives me that perfectly unaccountable feeling of having heard and seen it all a long time ago, — a hundred years ago, in some other existence.”

“There is another feeling I sometimes have,” said Alice, “the reverse of that. I don’t know whether I can put it into words, — a sort of forecast of association, a certainty that some particular moment, not an important moment, not a moment when any thing happens, will stand out in my memory, distinct, so I shall seem to be having it over again. Is that at all intelligible?”

“It must be,” said Lawrence; “because, although I don’t know the sensation, — if I understand you rightly, it is a sensation, — I am sure I catch your meaning.”

Alice did not answer: often they did not answer each other directly.

In a few moments they came out upon the open stream. The blue sky was over them, the river beneath. The swampy green of the meadows

was broken here and there by a dash of vivid contrasting color, — the scarlet of cardinal-flowers far off, and the blue-flags near at hand in the reeds.

Almost out of sight were some farmers, piling up a "hay-rigging" drawn by oxen.

"Do you look at the horizon when you are discontented, restless?" asked Alice suddenly.

"Always," said Lawrence, "even when it is the sharp edge of a roof."

"I wasn't looking for the horizon then," Alice explained: "I was looking for Dave Jones. Hear him singing 'Marching through Georgia'? He never sings any thing else."

They did not go much farther down the river. When they came back the ox-team had driven away; but there were still one or two figures moving against the sky, and the Jones boy was still singing somewhere.

They landed just above the willows, and walked diagonally across the meadow to the orchard-wall. Lawrence was abstracted: his idea was bothering him again.

In crossing the wall, Alice met with a slight mishap. She was usually very light and sure-

footed : but in springing down, she somehow lost her balance, and stumbled headlong. And Lawrence lost his senses.

He caught her passionately in his arms.

Lawrence found himself in the predicament of a man, who, playing with a fancy, is caught by a genuine passion. Hitherto his life had suited him remarkably well. He was a young man, who was so far in advance of his years as to be able to value his youth ; he was a clever man, with a delicate and critical knowledge of his own cleverness, that was in itself a preventive of vulgar conceit. The world presented itself to his view chiefly as a field for study, and this serious but irresponsible view of life was but one among his delicate and peculiar privileges. He had always a whimsical, agreeable consciousness of being not altogether as others are. To these advantages went certain substantial drawbacks ; and chief among them was the very commonplace lack of money that frequently drags genius and youth and impulse, and other beautiful things, into ways in which they must be extremely surprised to find themselves. It did not, however, cause Lawrence inconven-

ience. His income was sufficient even for his tastes, which were exact and fastidious rather than luxurious.

But, though it was not a present inconvenience, it was capable of presenting itself as an effectual barrier in his way. Marriage, for instance, though by no means impossible, would be quite undesirable for him. The artistic temperament habitually chafes under the homely restraints of economy, and it is a robust love that endures better than the artistic temperament. Now, there was little that was robust in Lawrence's whole highly strung nature; and in this case, as in others, he was happily aware of the extent of his capabilities.

Had these conditions remained unaltered, his method of dealing with his unlucky little fancy would have been extremely simple and direct. Remedy, the morning express bound east. And, if he could not have been called master of the situation, at least he would have been fairly resigned to the knowledge that the situation had mastered him; for, to his mind, there would have been no alternative.

But now there was an alternative.



"If I accept my uncle's legacy" — he said to himself, at his window in the gray morning twilight. He had restlessly paced his room half the night; he was at it again in the early morning, not knowing that his uneasy steps woke little Mrs. Hardy, who was restless in her room, thinking, "I wonder what she has been doing now;" but, even if he had known it, he could scarcely have resigned himself to be a more quiet neighbor.

His mood was not tragic, but it was thoroughly uncomfortable. "As the case stands, I have made a thorough fool of myself," he admitted irritably; and it was not an agreeable reflection. He came down to breakfast in an exceedingly bad temper.

The astute person who sat opposite, and poured the tea, watched him through her pale eyelashes, and talked much, faster than usual. He wished her at the antipodes. "If I accept my uncle's legacy" — he said to himself, walking up the sunny village street after breakfast. He paused still at the phrase. All the intellectual currents of his nature set so strongly against busy Farborough and the successful iron-works, active prosperity, and respectable boredom. What!

overturn, for this mere passion, his whole well-ordered plan of life? Resist when youth and passion were so strong? The dilemma was very nicely balanced.

He walked north and out of the village, following a road that wound deeper and deeper into Unity woods, a straggling, irregular growth of pines. Lawrence is no more susceptible to association than the unsentimental American should be, yet to this day he cannot walk through scanty pine-woods in June without meeting the ghost of his old perplexity and struggle.

Something in the sight of the straight trunks, the dark-green needles against the blue overhead, the light-brown needles thick upon the ground underfoot, yes, and the pleasant spicy smell of the warm air, still revives the day when he came to choose between so strong a desire and all that his reason had valued for years. It was a very genuine passion, and he acknowledged it—in the woods. He also acknowledged how gravely his decision must affect Alice, and this from the practical, unsentimental point of view. He flinched as he thought of her loneliness, her discontent, her hatred of the dreary, isolated life she led.

How to leave this young girl to her lonely fate? "Am I a coward?" was his way of putting it, and he endured a gentlemanlike spasm of disgust at the possibility that he was.

He had walked farther than he knew among the pines; and when he turned back to the village, he found the road long, and the sun directly and persistently over the crown of his straw hat.

Mrs. Hardy met him at the door; but she could make nothing of his looks, and was forced to content herself with observing that his shoes were very dusty, and the nape of his neck most brilliantly sunburnt.

## V.

“A letter may alter the plans we arranged  
Over-night for the slaughter of time.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

ALICE DINSMORE considered herself in many respects an unfortunate girl, but she always acknowledged that she was fortunate in having a very charming friend.

This was a lady whom she met on one of the last journeys she took with her father.

Her name was Celia Crosby: she was many years older than Alice, and she had been twice married and twice widowed. Her history, as commonly reported, was rather romantic.

It was said that her first marriage had been signally unhappy. The handsome young man whom she devotedly loved proved himself dissipated and worthless, and treated her at first with neglect, and afterwards with positive brutality.

At last there was a worse quarrel or graver cause than usual; and the handsome scapegrace

went away, and his young wife went back to her relatives and her early home. He never came back again, but within a year news of his death came instead.

And then Celia conducted herself in a most unreasonable manner. She mourned with blind and unaccountable persistence, shut herself in with her grief, and declared that she could never again believe the world or share its joys.

All time passes, and this passed for her. She was still a young and very handsome woman: and, as she came out from her seclusion, she found that she had not lost the capacity for enjoyment; and she thought the world was much the same as ever, except that she laughed at it more, and on the whole people liked her better.

She travelled a good deal in those days; and she found time to read books, and her fellow-creatures as well; and the development that her experiences had begun in her character became more apparent.

Then came Richard Crosby, who loved her, and followed her with a dog-like fidelity that she laughed at, and liked, and told him was useless.

But it was not useless, as he knew ; and at last it prevailed, and he won Celia, if not her love.

They spent some happy years together ; and, when he died, he left her a pleasant memory, as well as his substantial fortune. Celia said that he had saved her faith in human nature, which is perhaps as exalted praise as man need desire.

When Alice first knew her she was already near middle age ; but she had kept much of her beauty, and nearly all of her charm. Her graceful figure had grown a trifle heavy ; but her dark-auburn hair, her fair complexion, and her brilliant eyes were almost as beautiful as ever.

She affected no youthful graces ; but she certainly had exquisite taste in dress, and she wished Alice to call her Celia.

She liked Alice at first for a resemblance she fancied she saw in the young girl to her younger self. As she forgot the reason, the liking remained, and friendship followed.

Alice had visited her once or twice, — Celia's absence in Europe had prevented more frequent meetings, — and they wrote each other long letters.

On the morning succeeding the events recorded

in the last chapter, Alice received a letter with the familiar post-mark. Celia usually spent her summers in a little village on the Hudson.

Many years ago fashion flowed away from the place to the sea.

Within a few years, though fashion did not come back, some of the people did. They were old residents, and with them some new people who either were, or wished to appear, exclusive.

There is a certain dainty, indefinable charm about an unread letter. Open it, and the spell vanishes: that which is always falls short of that which might be. Alice thought something of this sort, as she walked back through the village under the maples that lined its one long street.

She congratulated herself that she was not eager to open the letter. "It gives me a peculiarly delightful sensation, to defer a pleasure within my grasp, just for the mere caprice."

The maples lifted their heads toward the blue sky, with something that looked like an air of sturdy pride and pleasure in their vigorous life. The sunlight fell between their pointed leaves upon the road.

There is all of summer in the shadows cast by a maple in full foliage.

Alice watched the lights and shadows with pleased eyes, and she was pleased with the conceit of the unread letter: indeed, she was in a mood to be pleased with all things that summer morning.

Her gayest moods were usually of the sort the Scotch call "fey," and were apt to be followed by a dull, unreasonable depression; but this sane, sweet cheerfulness was something altogether different. The world was beautiful, life was good, nothing was impossible. She felt that it was good to be alive, and it was glorious to be young.

"Now, if this were my usual mood," she thought, "people would consider me a very good girl, which they certainly do not at present. The question is, am I uncommonly good, or only unusually comfortable? an excellent digestion and high animal spirits, or amiability and all the virtues?" She walked briskly, and soon became conscious that the morning was warm as well as beautiful; and it was with an agreeable sensation just short of fatigue that she passed under the drooping branches of the elms at the gate. The



front-door was unlocked; and she opened it, and went from the dark, cool hall into the cooler parlor.

The room was closed and dark: it was not damp, hardly close; but it had a reserved, exclusive atmosphere of its own, which accorded with the darkness and the quiet, and even with the dignified hair-cloth sofa upon which Alice immediately sat down. It was a peculiarly hard, smooth, and slippery sofa; and its surface was a little worn here and there, and very much inclined to prick the unwary hand that rested upon it.

Alice watched the long rays that fell through the chinks of the blind, with indolent enjoyment. Then it occurred to her that the sensation of deferring a pleasure had lasted long enough; and she admitted a little more of the clear morning light, and opened Celia's letter.

Celia was a pleasant letter-writer, and certain mutual peculiarities had made her letters particularly pleasant to Alice; but now, as she read, she had a new, unfamiliar sense of dealing with something foreign to herself, or at least to her present mood. "It is very singular," she said. "I used to think and speak in the very way that Celia does,

and it was not imitation but a real likeness ; and now " — She left the sentence unfinished, and took up the letter. Celia sketched some of her neighbors slightly, yet distinctly enough : Alice made little mental pictures of them as she read. There were great attractions for her in one of the pictures.

"Harry Ashley is a fortunate young gentleman, who has life upon as delightful terms as the Prince Charming of a fairy story. His father acquired a wonderful fortune very quickly, and he also built a wonderful country-house here : you should see it, and its grounds, and its flower-beds with shaded borders ; but no matter about them now. Very soon after the house was finished, he died ; and his son and heir is my fortunate neighbor. He is here at present overlooking his estate, and I think he fancies himself a little bored by that and other things in this troublesome world."

Alice paused with a little sigh of envy. She wondered how life might look to a young man who had the freedom of the world and a fortune before him.

The description went on to a greater length, and made young Ashley seem a pleasant fellow ;

but at the time she did not pay much attention to that. Celia closed by urging Alice to visit her.

Alice looked perplexed, as she slipped the closely written sheets back into their envelope. She drew them out and re-read them, and looked up to laugh and say, "I believe Celia wants me to come and amuse her fortunate neighbor."

She walked twice across the room, and considered, keeping the little perplexed frown on her face; then she came back and sat down. "And perhaps it would be best for me to go."

She sat there a long time in the quiet parlor, and she gave Celia's invitation a good deal of serious thought.

She did not tell herself that her reluctance to leave Unity was strange, for she was honest enough to acknowledge that it was not strange; but she did not name her reasons quite clearly even to herself. She did not say that she cared deeply for her power over Lawrence, but she did say that she would like to put it to the test.

"I shall like to tell him I am going away," she said confidentially. "He will be so astonished, and an astonished man is so awkward, and then" — She dropped the sentence, and put

the thought into a little dark corner of her brain, whose arrangement was not very clear to herself. And all at once she felt a hot wave of color rise to her temples ; and she hid her face in her hands, and took them down again as she remembered that there was no one to see whether she hid her face or not. "You are very nice," she said, apparently to the arm of the sofa, "but this will not do at all ;" and she added, "Decidedly, I shall go and amuse Mr. Ashley."

And then she ran up-stairs in very high spirits, wrote a pretty letter to Celia, and sealed it with great promptness and decision. Her high spirits continued during the rest of the day : she laughed and talked more than was usual with her, and sang as she went about the house.

"And, after all, I am a little sorry to go," she owned, with a feeling of virtuous candor at confessing so much. She had read somewhere, "We can never say of any thing not wholly evil, 'This is the last,' without regret:" and these summer days had not been wholly evil ; far from it, they had been very pleasant. Yes, she was sorry to go : she would own it frankly.

At five o'clock she went to her room, and made

a very careful toilet before the sunlight faded out of its west windows. She put on a black dress of a clinging fabric that suggested the curves of her tall young figure; little frills of black pointed lace lay against her white throat and arms, and in her hair was a tea-rosebud. And she wore one rose in her breast, a large pale flower fully blown,—a trifle too much so perhaps; but, if it had lost the freshness of the bud, it had gained instead a fragile charm peculiarly its own. It was an image of beauty trembling on the verge of dissolution.

When she had finished dressing, she leaned over her little white-covered table, and touched that portion of the small glass that reflected the sweet, fresh color of her cheek. “I am very good to go away,” she said saucily: “Mr. Lawrence ought to be extremely obliged to me.”

All her veins tingled pleasantly; and the little thrill of gratified vanity made her walk in a dainty, stately way, as if she wore high-heeled slippers and long gloves, and trailed brocades and velvets down the narrow farmhouse stairs. She went into the sitting-room, and met a whiff of fragrant wood-smoke, and mingled with it a cer-

tain spicy odor very acceptable to a young woman who was practical enough to possess a particularly good appetite. She dropped her dignity, and ran into the kitchen very briskly. The room was full of a blue haze. "O aunt Eunice!" said Alice: "gingerbread?"

"Burnt," said Miss Eunice briefly: "it usually is." She drew a pan out of the oven, and shut the door with a snap. Alice began to cough a little in the smoke, and crossed to the open door. "And such is life," she moralized to the pale-yellow hollyhock that stood as high as her shoulder just outside. "We either burn our cake or our fingers, or else our neighbor's fingers. Probably burning the cake is most serious; for, whatever happens, we must have tea."

She looked back, and saw her aunt's spare figure, and the low familiar room, through a blue shifting cloud; and she looked before, and saw the orchard with the dusk half-way up the cherry-trees, and the lingering sunlight reddening in their tops.

"There is a letter for you on the table, Alice," said Miss Eunice, lightly scraping the under side of a brown loaf: "Jimmy Hunt brought it," she

continued, as Alice took up the envelope and went back to the door. The light was perceptibly dimmer now.

Alice looked across the orchard-wall, and saw a large, dilapidated straw hat going up the hill. The departing Jimmy was probably beneath it, but he was not otherwise visible.

She tore the envelope apart, and read :—

DEAR MISS DINSMORE, — I am unexpectedly recalled to Boston, and, worse still, am obliged to leave at once. I regret deeply that I am unable to see Miss Fairfield and yourself, and express in person my sense of obligation for your kind hospitality during this pleasant summer. Pray accept my very sincere thanks, and pardon the way in which I am forced to offer them. With many regards to Miss Fairfield and yourself, believe me

Yours sincerely,

KENNETH LAWRENCE.

By this production Mr. Lawrence had distinguished himself, after twenty-four hours of indecision.

Alice began to read, smiling slightly at Jimmy's remarkable hat ; and when she had finished the note, the little smile was still on her face. In-

deed, she had some difficulty in getting rid of it : by some unexplained process, it seemed to have been frozen. She seemed to have been always standing in the open door, to have been always motionless, always smiling.

At last—it was about five minutes later—she went back into the room : “Aunt Eunice, this note is from Mr. Lawrence. He has gone to Boston. And please read it yourself.”

Miss Eunice turned sharply ; and Alice felt absolute terror at sight of her thin, flushed, astonished face. However, she was happily slow of speech ; and before she had found her scattered wits, there was time to lay the letter on the table, and get out of the door and across the orchard, out of reach of discussion for the present at least.

She sat down upon the wall, and undertook to think the matter out quietly. The numb dulness of mind had passed away, and she felt capable of clearer thought than ever before.

Strangely enough, she scarcely glanced at Lawrence’s conduct ; she gave his motives no thought at all : they were of no immediate importance. But it was of immediate and vital importance to



save her own pride and self-respect, to prove to herself that she had not allowed vanity to place her in a false position, that she had not been ridiculous, that she was not contemptible in her own eyes.

She examined her own conduct coolly, even harshly. Certainly there were mistakes that might have been avoided, there was one moment of weakness that brought the blood to her cheeks as she thought of it: and yet, viewed calmly, there was nothing in strikingly false taste; she had not misrepresented herself, she had not been ridiculous.

She paused with a sigh of relief.

All at once a scorching wave of shame and anger seemed to rush over her: she trembled from head to foot, and buried her face in her hands. "*I* to be shamed when I thought so highly of myself! *I* to be slighted! *I* to be baffled when I thought I had power!"

A faint, bruised, tea-sweet smell rose from the bosom of her dress. She looked down, and saw the little yellow centre of her rose. She had brushed every petal from its slight hold. She sprang down from the wall, and raised her skirts

slightly as she felt the damp grass. She shook them a little, and walked toward the house. "I don't know that it would improve matters for me to have rheumatism or a fever," she said, drying her little worn boots at the kitchen-fire.

It seemed to her that Miss Eunice was abnormally quiet at the tea-table.

"She is not a *very* talking woman," she thought nervously and ungrammatically: "yet it must come sooner or later, and I would rather have it now."

At last Miss Eunice spoke across the tea-tray: "Alice, is it your fault that Kenneth Lawrence has gone away?"

"No, it is not my fault," said Alice mechanically; and there the matter rested until they had finished tea. When they rose from the table, Miss Eunice went over to Alice, and laid a hand on each of the girl's shoulders, — a most unusual act for her. Alice was the taller by half a head; and the older woman's worn, sallow face looked up into hers.

"Alice, you are very handsome," she said distinctly.

"Yes, aunt Eunice," with modest decision.

A faint color rose in Miss Fairfield's thin cheeks. "Alice, have you used your good looks to trick my old friend's son?"

Alice's nerves had been strained to a serious and uncomfortable point for two mortal hours, and at this her facile Celtic nature swung to the other side of the balance.

The corners of her mouth twitched, and a dimple showed in her cheek.

Her aunt released her instantly, and went out of the room with her lips very tightly pressed together.

Poor Miss Eunice! the question certainly had its pathetic aspect, and it was hard upon her that it should have been met with a laugh.

It was early when Alice went to her room, and there was a half-grown crescent hanging in the western sky.

She sat some time by the window, but not in a sentimental mood. Afterwards she lighted her lamp, and began to turn over some of her belongings in a bureau-drawer, in a comfortable, absent-minded way. Suddenly she came upon the little scarlet shawl, and—it is hard to say why association should linger so strongly here—an actual

physical pain seemed to contract her heart. "It is not enough that I cared nothing for him," she cried passionately: "it is intolerable that I am obliged to *say* I cared nothing."

## VI.

“How many goodly creatures are there here!  
... O brave new world,  
That has such people in’t!”

*The Tempest.*

CELIA CROSBY stood at a window on the sunny side of her house. It was shaded by Venetian blinds; and, looking through their little green bars, she saw a cloudless sky, a glittering river, the freshly clipped lawn and in its centre a great oval of geraniums dropping pink and scarlet petals on the sod. Alice came around the corner of the house, in a white dress and without a hat.

“Guess what I have here, Celia,” she said, holding one hand behind her, and shading her eyes with the other.

“Tuberoses,” said Celia. “You should stand farther off to make guessing fair. And come out of the sun, careless child,” she added, opening the blind.

Alice stepped over the sill, and sank into a low

chair. "I am not particularly afraid of the sun," she said. "I don't feel as if his tremendous majesty was bent on such small game as myself just at present."

"Oh! I was not thinking of any thing so trivial as sunstroke," said Celia; "but fancy enduring life for the next week with a sunburnt complexion."

Alice was breaking her tuberose from their stalk: the room was filled with the deathly sweetness. "You'll put them in my hair, Celia," she said coaxingly, leaning her head toward Mrs. Crosby, and holding out a handful of dead-white flowers and pale-pink buds. Her hair was drawn up to the top of her head, and twisted loosely in a way that suggested portraits of ladies of the last century. Celia set the flowers in the edge of the soft, heavy coil.

She turned her face aside as she did it: her taste was for delicate, faint-scented flowers. "How can you wear them, Alice? The odor is intolerable."

"It is luxurious, and I like luxuries. When I come into my fortune, you will see me trailing ever so many yards of velvet after me, and wear-

ing diamonds in the morning probably. I think my taste is becoming thoroughly false."

"Puritanic influences in the rebound," suggested Celia.

"Yes," said Alice, nodding gravely, and leaning back in the sloping chair. She added, "But this is a land of civilization. This morning I cut my hair across my forehead, and bought a pair of slippers in the village. See!" she extended an arched, slender foot.

Celia laughed pleasantly. "I'm sorry to differ with you, my dear, but I should never call that slipper civilized."

Alice allowed the little high-heeled monster to hang from her foot, and swing back and forth. "It is not what people call sensible," she admitted.

"Hardly," said Celia.

"Probably I should not like it if it were. I like absurd things: I believe I like to be absurd, myself. I think I am becoming hopelessly silly, Celia. I don't know what I can have done with my cleverness."

"Ah! well, it is one of the best things in this world to know you had it once," said Celia.

"But I am not so stupid that I can't tell when you are laughing at me," objected Alice. She looked with languid admiration at Celia's delicate dress, that suited so well her dark hair and fair though no longer fresh complexion. Alice looked from the trailing skirts to her own white wrapper. "Query, why is one's morning dress perfectly creditable before one o'clock, and entirely objectionable afterwards? I suppose I must dress," she said.

"Don't say 'must' in that serious tone," said Celia. "I have banished that word as far as next winter, at least. It doesn't suit the present season."

"How delightful you are, Celia!" sighed Alice, clasping her hands behind her head, and allowing the slipper to dangle from her foot.

"That is very pretty, but I am afraid you only mean that doing as you like is delightful."

"It is nice to have one's own way, certainly," said Alice. She was looking down, and did not see the kind, admiring eyes with which Celia looked at her. Celia was a lover of beauty in her own sex; and she admired Alice from her white arms crossed behind her head, and the little bright-



brown locks on her forehead, to the pointed toe of her slipper, with a fine, discriminating admiration.

"I think your Harry Ashley is a very provoking person," said Alice suddenly.

Celia laughed: "Has that any thing to say to having one's own way, Alice?"

Alice raised her eyes from the slipper. "Of course: but that is why I like talking with you; you don't require all the links of the chain. But this is plain enough, surely: you rouse all my curiosity by a description, and the subject of it quietly goes to New York the day before I arrive. That is not having my way at all."

"Yes; but he is not my Harry Ashley, or I should have kept him here for your especial benefit. I suppose he will remain a week or so in the city."

"He must be insane—in such weather as this," said Alice indignantly. "I don't think I care about seeing him" — slipper swaying rapidly to and fro.

Celia, who had been looking out of the window, turned her head with a smile. "Then I think you had better go up-stairs."

"Why?" immediately sitting upright.

"Because he is crossing the lawn at this moment."

Alice started to her feet without the slipper, which made the best of an opportunity to fall off. The little clock struck the half-hour after two, as she ran up-stairs. She had left her shoe on the floor; and Celia dropped an open novel over it, as Harry Ashley crossed the threshold.

"Welcome back, Harry: when did you arrive?"

Alice heard what was said, from where she stood in the upper hall.

"Thanks. I arrived at 9.30 this morning. New York with the thermometer in the nineties isn't exactly the thing." This in a vigorous, young voice, with the fresh, likable sound in it that wins its owner the privilege of talking all sorts of nonsense to sensible people.

"An agreeable voice," said Alice, still at the head of the stairs, — "a very agreeable voice, and I am critical in the matter of voices." She was not quite like other girls, after all; for here she went off into a theory she had about voices in general, where perhaps most young women would

have been thinking of the particular voice that had suggested her train of thought.

She came back to the stairs, and fastened her dress as she stood. "I suppose he has finished talking about the weather by this time. Celia never encourages the thermometer sort of conversation."

Celia always passed by the minor ills of life in a discreet silence.

He was not talking about the weather.

"Is this the way you treat your light literature, Mrs. Crosby?"

"What can he mean by that?" thought Alice.

"Ah!" with the rising inflection: "now where do you keep the young lady?" Harry had taken up first the novel, and then the slipper under it.

"How do you know she is a *young* lady?" said Celia. "It may belong to some ancient person like myself."

He turned the slipper over, and looked at it critically. "You wouldn't wear a heel like that," he said, shaking his head with a quizzical look; "and the ancient person would be rather likely to break her neck if she tried it."

Celia smiled at his distinction. "You may give it to me for the present, Harry."

"Not at all," he said coolly, putting it in his pocket. "I mean to have the pleasure of putting it on Miss Cinderella's foot."

Just then Alice came in at the open door. Celia presented Mr. Ashley, who looked frankly and pleasantly unconscious of the slipper.

Alice looked at Celia's young neighbor with a good deal of curiosity. He was a young man of twenty-two, looking perhaps a trifle younger, rather tall and broad-shouldered, fair but not blonde, with brown hair, a good-looking rather boyish face, and a pair of very blue eyes.

They got on well together from the very first. Afterwards she could not recall much that was said; but she remembered that Celia made every thing easy, and that they all got on very well.

Harry told Alice about the fortunes of the little town, — how the people went away, and how they had lately come back again, a little for the sake of avoiding crowds, and a good deal for the sake of doing something new. And he was kind enough to add that it was not much of a bore, after all.

Alice raised her eyebrows ever so slightly, and thought, "I wonder what you can know about being bored by any thing?"

Celia smiled and said nothing. She never made others feel young, or small, or inexperienced.

But they both liked the nonsense that he talked, and liked his way of saying it, and his ready laugh, and his blue eyes.

When the little clock struck five, it surprised everybody; and Harry rose to go.

Alice held out her hand with a little impertinent air, and said, "My slipper, if you please, Mr. Ashley."

Harry hesitated with a laughing, reluctant look, and finally took the little shoe out of one of his coat-pockets, and laid it across her palm with a grand bow.

After he got outside the door he soliloquized about it, not aloud, "Sometimes that sort of thing is possible, and sometimes not; and it is very well for a fellow to know which is which."

Alice went and sat down on a little low stool beside Celia, and rubbed her cheek against her friend's hand with a pretty, cat-like motion. "Celia, he is a delightful boy."

"He would be extremely obliged to you for saying so," said Celia.

"Ah! but he will never know it. I shall make him think himself quite a venerable person, and he will be sure to like that."

Harry Ashley was a favored mortal, whom every one liked. He was not remarkable for any unusual gifts,—was not remarkable in any way when you considered upon it; and there was even a possibility that when he was thirty years old he might be as commonplace as the rest of the world: yet at twenty-two he was actually charming to every human being who approached him.

He had grown up in the face of every good fortune, had in fact been petted to an unconscionable extent, and yet he was quite unspoiled. He had "done Europe" in a three-months' tour, and had yet managed to escape any sort of superciliousness; and, though he professed to be a little bored by most things, he could never disguise his thorough good-temper with himself and the world. Men invariably liked him. He was not a fop, nor a snob, nor a prig, nor any thing else the average man dislikes; and he was frank and gen-

erous and manly, and on the best of terms with life.

Diplomatic mothers liked him as well as they liked the reputed amount of his income; their daughters favored his youthful good looks, and his blue eyes, and his boyish, nonchalant manners, which still had a certain fine native deference toward women, and kindness toward all.

Doubtless there were flatterers and hypocrites among those that followed him; but his good luck never put them to the test, and he had the shrewdness not to be badly tricked by any of them. He took the world as it came, with hearty good-temper, and enjoyed it better than he ever knew.

On coming down to breakfast next morning, there was a little heap of letters on Celia's plate. On two of the envelopes the handwriting was feminine,—the one large, sloping; and angular, the other much smaller, round, and upright. The remaining letter was addressed in a really beautiful masculine hand, that seemed to express much decision. Alice had no letters, and sipped her chocolate tranquilly as Celia read. Celia looked

up from her third letter with two little wrinkles on her white forehead.

"They are all coming at once," she said pathetically; "and I don't think the whole State is large enough to hold them comfortably."

Alice put her cup down. "I would like to sympathize with you, but that sounds too promising. Who are they, Celia?"

"Alfred Wilson, Juliette d'Etreville, and Augusta Winters. You have never met any of them? No? Well, Juliette d'Etreville is a woman of society: she is twenty-six, unmarried, ambitious. Her ideas are all conventional, and her actions perfectly independent. Mrs. Winters is assistant principal in a girls' school. She has advanced ideas about women, indeed about all things, but they will not hurt any one: she is a very nice little woman. Mr. Wilson was popular in society twenty years ago, and he is more popular and more in society than he was then. Now, how I am to reconcile Juliette to Augusta Winters, or Augusta Winters to either of the others, is more than I dare to think."

"I will protect Mr. Wilson from Mrs. Winters, and Mr. Wilson shall protect me from Miss



d'Etreville," said Alice. "I feel that I am going to be terribly afraid of her. May I see her handwriting, Celia?"

"Yes; but there is nothing very original about it. It is ugly and fashionable," said Celia, passing the letter across the low dish of bright verbenas in the middle of the table.

"That is just what I am afraid of," said Alice. "I don't fear anybody's originality."

"Look at this address," said Celia, passing Mr. Wilson's letter across the table. "I never can understand how it happens that characterless people so often write that beautiful, forcible hand. And the most puzzling part of the question is, that it comes by nature. I don't think it can be acquired."

"There is your large way of looking at things," said Alice, breaking a small crisp roll. "You always discuss people in classes."

"Unfortunately I have to discuss them in a cottage this time. And I must harmonize Juliette d'Etreville and Augusta Winters."

"It is a pity you cannot put them all in a novel, Celia. Miss d'Etreville and Mr. Wilson are society models,—good for conversation. Mrs.

Winters gives the Ideas, always with a capital 'I.' And I dare say we could find a hero — Mr. Ashley would do for one of the unheroic sort."

"Who is the beautiful heroine?" said Celia, smiling.

"I am the beautiful heroine," said Alice archly.

Celia laughed: "You have the frankest vanity of any one I ever knew. What shall become of you — in the novel, I mean?"

Alice was examining a small Japanese personage in her plate. "That is the great feature of the modern novel. Nothing becomes of the characters: they dissolve in a sort of mist."

Celia's visitors soon appeared. Shortly before noon one day, arrived a small, blonde, fatigued gentleman, one of those neutral-tinted beings who look much the same at twenty and at sixty. He was actually about half-way between the ages at which he was destined to look almost equally neutral, tired, and blonde.

At lunch he developed a sprightly manner, and retailed various bits of spicy society gossip to Celia. Celia was not the sort of woman to whom gossip is particularly acceptable, but she indulged Mr. Wilson: it was her *rôle* to indulge.

After lunch he revived still more, and addressed much of his conversation to Alice.

"The fact is, I represent a past generation," he told her, smoothing his mustache with the very touch of twenty years ago. The gesture escaped being ridiculous just as narrowly as the smile escaped being melancholy. "I am a sort of wreck, left on the shore by the wave going out."

Alice discovered that he was fond of using this expression. He repeated it frequently, and apparently with much relish. "I dare say it would be more decorous, at my age, if I could find the world dull; but I don't, you see. I know there is nothing the matter with the world. It is I who am out of tune, worn out, at fault generally. I'm a mere wreck," concluded the dapper little gentleman cheerfully. Alice wondered whether he would not like to be contradicted.

He went on chattering in lively little phrases, and repeating his half-humorous, half-melancholy regret.

At three o'clock the day after, Celia's carriage brought the ladies from the station.

They certainly had not travelled together, though they arrived at the same time.

Miss d'Etreville was tall and blonde, plain of feature, of large muscular frame, with broad shoulders and tapering waist, — what her dressmaker considered a very fine figure.

She wore a handsome, neutral-colored traveling-dress, not at all dusty or disarranged ; had a confident, impressive manner, and displayed large, brilliant teeth when she talked.

She went to her room almost immediately, saying frankly that she must sleep. She did not even profess to have a headache. "I want to be perfectly fresh for the evening," she said to Celia : "I know you mean to have some nice people here, and I must get up my looks in the mean time."

Mrs. Winters was of a very different type. She was a small woman in a dusty black dress : she had a thin, brown face, wide at the brows, narrow at the jaw, and with a considerable space between the bright, dark eyes. She declined rest, but accepted a cup of tea ; and she told Alice the whole history of her life, on the shady side of the piazza.

She said that her youth had been a series of struggles for bread, for education, for social recognition. She had married — she did not say unhappily ; had been early widowed, thus thrown

again upon her own resources ; had struggled on, had sewed, taught, written, worked early and late ; had earned and saved slowly and painfully, for the college course that had been her young desire.

She broke down in health under studies and hardships, lost her scanty capital when it was most needed, finally found friends and a position that would support her, gave up the higher education and the medical diploma of her ambition, and, from the foothold she had gained, was trying, with her pen and her voice and her small means, to influence the great nation and the great world for her sex, and to rouse her sex to struggle for its rights.

She confided all this to Alice in half an hour's acquaintance ; yet she was not vulgar, nor even positively ridiculous. She had an eager, fluttering, constrained manner, and was plainly of New-England birth and training, having the brown skin, vivid eyes, and lighter hair, which indicate the darker strain of Puritan blood.

Alice listened to her with kind, well-bred attention. As she predicted, she had been rather overwhelmed by Miss d'Etreville ; and she found Mrs. Winters's deprecating confidences something of a relief.

## VII.

"I am in love with this green earth, the face of town and country, the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here." ELIA.

MISS D'ETREVILLE'S prediction proved entirely correct. Celia had some very nice people in her parlors that evening.

Miss d'Etreville herself came down-stairs in a costume of cream-color and scarlet, amazing to behold in connection with the wearer's yellow-blond physique. "There is the advantage of having no complexion to speak of," she remarked calmly to Celia. "No color is particularly becoming to me: but I have the freedom of them all, if I like; and I do like."

She always spoke with cool, matter-of-fact frankness, that was little less astonishing in effect than her dress. This assured young woman was, in her own circle, almost a social power; though she was unmarried, had an absurdly small

income, and was absolutely without beauty or the soft arts of fascination.

It was wonderful to see how women feared and conciliated her, and what a circle of young men were always ready to be amused by her cool, direct speech. But it was remarked that she succeeded better with the circle than with one; and this suggested a reason why she still remained Juliette d'Etreville at the comparatively mature age of twenty-six.

This evening she had her usual successes.

When Harry Ashley arrived, she was at the piano, performing with a distinct, brilliant touch. Mr. Wilson, who wore an unhappy expression, was being eagerly entertained by Mrs. Winters; and Celia Crosby was surrounded by six very young girls.

Harry noticed the soft color of a turquoise-blue dress through one of the lace window-curtains. It could not be said that he recognized the color, but it gave him an idea. He crossed the room, raised the curtain on the other side, and said, "Good-evening, Miss Dinsmore." Then he stepped into the window, dropped the curtain, and congratulated himself on his acuteness.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ashley," said Alice, showing a little pink dimple in each of her cheeks.

Two hours before, she had been preparing to put on her black dress in a most melancholy state of mind. She did not admit that her dress annoyed her ; but she felt depressed and cynical, and uttered some middle-aged regrets that she had no pleasure in anticipating the evening, and had perhaps already lost her power of enjoying society.

Then there was a tap at her door ; and Celia came in with the turquoise-blue, and a handful of pale-pink roses. Alice immediately grew young again. She put on the dress, fastened the roses in her belt, and danced about her room, humming a waltz she had learned when she was twelve years old. She was not even afraid of Miss d'Etreville.

Of course, Harry did not know the history of the turquoise-blue: he was not even conscious of seeing it. He was chattering as usual, behind the lace curtain. "Just look at poor Wilson, Miss Dinsmore," he said with a suppressed laugh. "The look he has on ! You never saw any thing like it."

Alice leaned forward, and looked at the un-



happy little gentleman. There was profound melancholy in every line of his face: even his trim, little elderly mustache had a despondent droop. Mrs. Winters was still talking rapidly; her thin hands were fluttering; her hair, pushed off her face, had an excited appearance.

Alice drew back. "She is telling the history of her life," she said. "She told me this afternoon."

"She told me last winter; and, if she ever tries it again, I shall bolt," said Harry. He added, "It struck me that she might be rather a nice little woman, though; but that is one of the things no fellow will stand more than once."

Harry's little comments never had malice in them. Possibly his good-nature was not of a kind to endure under trials and discomforts, or even advancing years and the petty vexations of every day; but, in his prosperous youth, he was the kindest of mortals.

Alice looked up at him through her eyelashes. "You might go and rescue Mr. Wilson. Bring him in here, and let us entertain him."

"Ah!" said Harry. "But that is one of the things I won't stand at all."

"Hush!" said Alice. "We must listen to Miss d'Etreville's music."

"I never could listen," said Harry plaintively. "The fact is, I'm not fond of music."

Alice laughed in a way that might have meant several things.

"Oh! I suppose it is a damaging confession."

"Not at all," she said frankly; "but I never did hear any one confess as much before. It is new and refreshing, and altogether delightful. I wish you would keep on saying so, a great many times."

"The trouble is, it wouldn't keep on being new," said Harry.

"What nonsense we are talking!" said Alice. "I always say that, don't you? If we admit it is nonsense, it sounds as if we could be more sensible if we liked."

Soon after, they went out on the piazza.

There was a great white moon in the sky, that threw the slim shadows of supporting pillars on the veranda floor; and a light wind, that rustled in the vine hanging from its roof.

"This is a river breeze," said Harry. "Let me get you a shawl."

Miss d'Etreville had left a soft, white wrap piled on a chair in a corner of the music-room. Harry discovered it, and came back through the window with its creamy folds hanging over his arm. "I believe this isn't a shawl exactly," he said; "but it will do, all the same, won't it?"

"Admirably. It is not mine, though. I think it must belong to Miss d'Etreville; and I dare say you haven't discovered that it is something very magnificent. Can you find the beginning of it?"

Harry had turned the cloak over once or twice in a doubtful manner.

"This *may* be a collar," he said. "And, if it is, I know what to do with it. Is that right?" fastening the little silver clasp very deftly and lightly under her chin.

It was a very becoming cloak. It fell nearly to the bottom of her dress, and around the throat was a little ruff of creamy lace that Harry pronounced a collar.

"It is right, supposing I am right to wear the cloak at all. Perhaps Miss d'Etreville likes walking on the piazza. And I was afraid of her before."

"Miss d'Etreville is talking to a dozen people, so she can't have any attention to spare for piazzas," said Harry consolingly. "But you can't mean that you are really afraid of her?"

"Not really afraid of her," said Alice confidentially; "but I have the most awful terror of her back hair, and her long gloves, and the train of her skirts, and all the seasons she must have spent in society."

Harry laughed suddenly like a schoolboy, then he looked down at her as they walked. His back was to the moonlight, and she could not see his look, but only the dark outline of his head and shoulders. "Why, don't you know you are a great deal better off without all these things?" he said, with a little instructive manner. Then they turned; and the moon shone full in his kind, amused, boyish face.

"I don't know," said Alice doubtfully, making "know" a very long word. "Do you mean to say I have been better off in the wilderness?"

They were getting on so well that he asked her, "Would you mind telling me what sort of wilderness it is?"

"My wilderness is about twenty miles this side

of Boston," said Alice; "and it is rather more than twenty years behind the times in its ideas."

"You had better advise some of the people here to emigrate. That sort of place ought to suit them exactly. Rural simplicity, you know, and old enough to be rather new. Now, what are the principal attractions of the village?"

"Swamps," said Alice. "Don't you know the sort of place? They have three churches and two cemeteries, and all the young people go away."

"Oh! not so bad as that," said Harry. "It isn't possible, really, now?"

"It is too possible," said Alice. "It is highly probable. It is true."

"Then tell me something more about it," he said. Somehow he felt older, and possessed of much worldly wisdom. It was a peculiarly agreeable feeling.

"No, not to-night," said Alice. "Some other time."

She was not disturbed or uncomfortable when she thought of Unity. The moon had gone under a cloud, and she could see very little; but she felt that the house was large and hospitable

behind her. She heard a pleasant hum of voices and piano-playing from its windows: she was leaning on Harry's arm; and, as her fingers touched his sleeve, she approved of the fine surface of the cloth. She was the sort of woman who is exhilarated by brushing against a refined coat-sleeve or a perfumed dress.

She felt that the unexplored world was large and beautiful around her, and that she was sheltered and amused in an especially pleasant corner of it.

A clock began to strike within.

"One, two," she said, counting. "Three" —

"Oh! no," interrupted Harry. "Don't count it, Miss Dinsmore."

"Then I shall go in at once," she said mischievously. She ran to the window, and stepped quickly in. Harry followed with rather an injured expression.

Alice charmed several young men that evening successively, not after the manner of Miss d'Etreville. When she talked with them she looked up sweetly and lazily through her long lashes, and showed her pink dimples and short white teeth when she laughed; and all this quite natu-

rally, and without deliberate purpose, more than the purpose of a kitten following a worsted ball.

Meantime Harry had been drawn into the circle of Miss d'Etreville. He was promptly bidden by her to give an account of himself; and did nothing of the sort, but listened to a lively and dramatic account of some of her own experiences instead, and was heartily amused in common with the rest of her audience.

She gave him no undue share of her attention, and a young lady's preferences must not be too plainly stated; yet it is certain that at one period her aspiring and practical mind had fixed rather strongly upon the Ashley estates, not to mention their young owner. The young man eluded her rather cleverly, however; and this remarkable woman recognized the impossibility, and pardoned the defeat.

"He is only a boy, and I ought to be able to manage him," she told herself plainly; "but I cannot, and there is the truth of it—worse luck for me!" And she wisely and magnanimously continued to amuse him whenever he came in her way.

Toward the end of the evening, Alice and Mr.

Wilson were together. The elastic little gentleman had recovered from his melancholy eclipse. Alice was a little tired, and was glad to be amused without effort of her own.

His talk was largely a little, chirping, not ill-natured, sort of gossip. He was a surface critic, who invariably judged his neighbor by the cut of the said neighbor's coat.

By and by the people went away; and Alice went to her pleasant room, and slept soundly and sweetly the whole night.

Hers was an east room; and, when she woke in the morning, it was filled with a warm, ruddy glow that had a homely cause. The dusk-red roof of the piazza was just below her window; and the sun, shining upon it, sent the sturdy color up and through the bars of the blind.

She lay quietly, with her hands clasped under her head, watching the red glow in the white room. In those days she had a new, fresh sense of enjoyment in every pleasant sight and sound that reached her. She had never been so entirely contented in her life. Her senses were more acute than ever; but her mental perceptions were a trifle less active than usual, and some traits of



her mind were noticeably dulled. She ceased to analyze either her own moods, or the characteristics of her neighbors. She saw that Mrs. Winters was eccentric, Miss d'Etreville worldly in a particularly frank manner, Mr. Wilson amusingly whimsical; but she failed to dissect any of them in the morbid, curious way that had once been her habit.

She was not entirely satisfied with the change. "I wonder what I have done with my cleverness," she said again to Celia. "Do you suppose happiness has been the death of it?"

"A plant that most with cutting grows,  
Most barren with best using," —

said Celia, who was not at all troubled.

Those were pleasant days. Celia's neighbors were prosperous, pleasure-seeking people; and their friendly sons and daughters drew Alice into a young, light-hearted circle, such as she had never known before.

They sailed and rowed on the river, walked, drove, danced when sensible people said it was far too warm for dancing; went to impossible places to see the sun set, and the moon rise; flirted,

gossiped, laughed, and chattered continually, and with the greatest satisfaction in life.

All the young men—to be sure, there were not very many of them—successively admired her, danced with her, took her out on the river moonlit evenings and cool mornings, carried her Japanese sunshade, and talked a good deal under its shining ribs.

A number of nice friendly girls noticed her kindly, linked arms with her on lawns and piazzas, and even volunteered little half-sentimental confidences which never met with the expected return.

Nobody fell openly and violently in love with her; few of the girls showed envy of her pretty looks: but she was very kindly and generally liked, admired, gossiped with, confided in, and amused. Harry Ashley followed her rather persistently; and she had an honest, frank liking for his blue eyes, his boyish good looks, and his friendly ways.

Mrs. Winters was rather a disturbing element. She dropped statistics and other solid matter upon the usual small-talk of the breakfast-table; and she exploded questions that could by no

means be answered in monosyllables in the hour after noon, when nobody wanted to talk at all. She developed a peculiar interest in Alice, and showed it in a manner that would have seemed like the frankest impertinence, if it had not been accompanied by her usual timid, nervous earnestness.

One morning she joined Alice on the piazza, and plunged directly into what she had to say. She was the sort of talker who habitually plunges. "Miss Dinsmore, it seems to me that you have capabilities, but I wish I could rouse you a little."

"Oh! please don't rouse me," said Alice earnestly. "I would so much rather not!"

Mrs. Winters looked at her sharply, then wistfully. "You will be roused some time. I wonder what you mean to do with your life?"

"Oh! I have not any objection to telling you," said the young lady, in rather an airy tone. "I mean to enjoy myself,—that is first,—and to make people like me, and not to grow old for a great many years,—and always to enjoy myself."

Mrs. Winters looked dignified. It was difficult; for she was much shorter than her companion, and dignity is largely a physical trait: yet

she accomplished it. "That is very well to say at your age, but do you know what you mean by it? Exactly, how do you mean to plan your life? For instance, do you mean to marry?"

Alice shrugged her shoulders, a gesture she seldom used. "One does not *intend* to marry, I should say. I might intend not to."

"Yes; and, if you do not, what then?"

Alice looked down at the little brown woman.

"Dear Mrs. Winters, I really have no intentions."

"That is a great pity," said Mrs. Winters. "You are precisely the type of woman that interests me most. You have capabilities, as I said before, but no particular talents. There is no twist in your mind. Even talent is a twist, though it may be a successful one."

"I beg your pardon, but there are a great many twists in my mind," said Alice, laughing.

Mrs. Winters went on calmly. "And that type of man is often a success, but it is the woman who interests me. She usually marries; and, when she does not, she is so often a failure! It seems to me that she should be a success, that she might be, if she would: but the trouble is

exactly what you told me just now. She has no intentions."

"Well, I cannot be expected to solve the problems of the race."

"No; but you must solve the problem of your own life," said the other sharply. "Do you think it will be easier when you are thirty years old?"

Alice felt suddenly small and cold in a large space. She shrank away; and Mrs. Winters, looking up, mistook the expression of her face.

"I am intrusive perhaps, and disagreeable. Well, I don't know that I can make you understand me better. I am a strong-minded woman, a person with a hobby. Very well, I do want the ballot for my sex; but first I want other things. I want self-respect and self-preservation. I want women not to marry as a profession or a refuge. I want them to learn to earn their bread, and live their lives out honorably and independently." She stopped, panting with excitement. She seemed a slight creature to deal with the large questions of the world. "I love other women. That is what makes me what I am. No man will believe it, and few women; yet it is true that a woman may love her sex with a

great passion. It is stronger than the love of kin or country."

The little shabby, voluble creature gained a certain nobility as she spoke. Just then they passed one of the open windows, and Alice looked in, hearing a slight sound. Miss d'Etreville sat by the window. She was leaning back in her chair, a handkerchief with pointed edges was pressed to her face, and she was shaking in a fit of violent, noiseless laughter.

Celia came out through the door with a slight flush on her fine, sensitive face. "Come and see my begonias, Augusta," she said pleasantly. "I want you to see this vase on the east corner." She looked kindly at Alice over Mrs. Winters's excited hair. Alice looked with an odd, bewildered expression from her to Miss d'Etreville. It seemed to her, that, though Mrs. Winters had impressed them from extremely opposite points of view, the impression in each case had been distinct, while she had merely been chilled for a moment by the unpleasant truth that she would one day be thirty years old.

Surely there was a time when she could have understood Mrs. Winters before this odd, cloak-

like dulness came between her mind and outer things. Well, on the whole, it was a comfortable dulness.

"There is a woman worth knowing," said Miss d'Etreville, who had come out of her pink-edged handkerchief. "Celia Crosby, I mean. She loves other women, if you like; but she doesn't bore them by talking about it. And she takes them to look at begonias."

Alice looked after the large figure of Celia, and the meagre one of her companion.

"Will you come and take a walk?" she said to Miss d'Etreville. She did not feel inclined for a personal discussion.

"Oh! no, my dear," said the young lady languidly. "You see, I never do take walks. I am not an energetic person." She extended one foot, — not a small one, — in an embroidered slipper, and a stocking like a light-blue cobweb.

Alice took her shade-hat from a red-painted chair, and went toward the west corner of the piazza, flecking some little dust from its trimming as she walked.

At the corner she came upon Mr. Wilson.

He looked at her, and her hat, which was not of the sort he was in the habit of criticising.

"I wonder what you call that?" he said, regarding the twisted trimming. "Isn't it a kind of Jacob's ladder?"

Alice laughed, and put the hat on her head.

"I call it the trimming of my hat, and I'm afraid no angels go over it."

"No—under it," said Mr. Wilson.

She made him a little mock courtesy, and went down the piazza steps. The bit of nonsense brightened her spirits.

She had never been as happy as she was in those summer days. It seemed to her that the face of the earth was pleasanter, the skies bluer, the sunshine brighter, the air she breathed sweeter, than ever before.

It was so good a thing to live! Not one condition of her life was permanently changed for the better. She knew that she must go back to Unity, that the long winter and the snows and the loneliness were before her, that she had nothing to rejoice in but the pleasantness of the moment, and—but this she never acknowledged—that somewhere in her memory was a shadow,



a slight, an affront, that would have jarred upon her if she had not forced it aside: yet, withal, she felt for the first time in her young life the conscious joy of living, and her heart was as light as a bird.

## VIII.

"It was a pleasure to persons of colder temperament, to sun themselves in the warmth of his bright looks and generous humor. His laughter cheered one like wine. I do not know that he was very witty, but he was pleasant."

THACKERAY.

ALICE went around the house into the kitchen-garden. This was a tidy place, with gravel-paths and trim-kept beds where vegetables and old-fashioned flowers flourished in hearty good-fellowship. Great disks of sunflowers nodded through the bean-poles, parti-colored balsams were on intimate terms with the pease, and in the end of a cucumber-bed was a tangle of nasturtiums, red-brown, orange, and pale yellow. On one side of the garden was a wall some eight feet high, separating Celia's property from that of her neighbor. This wall was covered to the very top by a vine with shining leaves, and it rose up a living green barrier against the sky. "Gardens should always have walls," said Alice, looking up at it

from under her hat. "Nobody wants an outlook from a bed of cabbages."

She went over to the wall after admiring it, and opened a little wooden gate that led into the neighbor's territory. She found herself in a lane; and from the lane you looked up to a gray, mediæval pile, whose twin towers rose from the top of the hill. This was Ashley Rock, and Ashley Rock was the architectural whim of an American manufacturer.

On this particular morning Alice looked over the low wall of the lane, and surprised the young owner of the Rock in a meditative attitude on the short, dry turf. In fact, he was lying flat on his back, with hands clasped under his head. When the gate clicked behind Alice, he heard it and sprang up.

"Too bad to disturb you," she said: "why don't you bar trespassers out?"

By this time he was over the wall. "I might tie Rex at the gate," he said, laughing. "Rex is my dog. He isn't vicious, but he's young, and he knocks people down whenever he can. That is his idea of a joke."

"Then, I hope Rex isn't down in the woods: that is where I am going," said Alice.

"Can't say, I'm sure," said Harry. "He roams all over the place. May I come—to keep him away?"

"‘May you?’ on your own land!" said Alice.

"Oh! I can occupy some other part of my land, if you don't want to be bothered."

"It will bother me a good deal if Rex knocks me down." She started down the lane, and Harry kept at her side.

"I should like to know what you were thinking about just now," she said. "There was such a meditative air about your elbows. Elbows are so expressive!"

"‘Out at elbows’ is expressive," said Harry. "I haven't gone through the sleeves of my coat, have I?" pulling one of them around to look at it. "No. I was thinking of something serious, though: you were right there."

They were in the wood by this time. The little grove was too well kept and cleared to be particularly picturesque; there was no underbrush, no tangle of fern: yet it was a pleasant bit of shade, and was upon the sloping bank above the river.

"Suppose you sit down here, Miss Dinsmore,"

said Harry. "Here" was a little seat between two young trees. Harry hung her sunshade in the branches, so as to catch the direct rays of the sun. Then he sat down on the moss and partridge-vines, and took off his hat. "It is rather jolly, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," said Alice absently. She looked at the river through slender trunks of trees, and up at the blue sky through the green branches. "Are you still serious?" she said, looking down at Harry.

He shook his close-cropped head. "I was serious up there, though,—about my place. I wish some Christian would tell me what to do with it."

"Enjoy it," said Alice.

Harry gave a quick glance at her. "I'm a good deal in the habit of enjoying myself," he said frankly; "but I was thinking about the house," looking up at the gray towers. "You don't know how it bothers me, Miss Dinsmore."

Harry had less real conceit than nine-tenths of the discreet persons who slip through a conversation never touching personalities; but, on the other hand, he had the cheeriest confidence that

what interested him was equally interesting to others.

"What is the matter with the house?" said Alice, smiling down upon him frankly, not coquetishly.

"It is a sham: that is what is the matter with it," said Harry. "It is well enough inside, and it is not so bad to look at; but see the absurdity of it. Here is a regular castle,—mediæval, you say? well a mediæval castle,—set up on the banks of the Hudson, of all places in the world! Of course I don't go in for culture, or that sort of thing; but—well, I don't like to feel myself a snob," the boyish color rising to his temples as he spoke.

"I don't know why you should," said Alice.

Harry was making a praiseworthy endeavor to gnaw his mustache. "The poor old governor" (Harry's tone was not in the least disrespectful) — "the poor old governor found out that a mediæval castle was a good thing to look at; but you see, I have found out that a sham mediæval castle isn't at all a good thing to own. That is the progress of a generation. Can you see that white rock out in the current, Miss Dinsmore?"

“That round one in a line with the tree? Oh, yes!”

“That is what they named the place for, Ashley Rock. You can’t see much of it, but you know it must be a fair-sized rock to show so far out in the stream. Well, every time I come across that awful name—I feel about as cheerful as if I had the Rock tied around my neck.”

Alice looked at him reflectively, then her dimples began to show.

“Oh, you lucky, ungrateful, happy, bored, unconscious creature!” with a peal of laughter. She always said what she liked to Harry.

He sprang up: “Oh! if you have got any more adjectives to throw at me, I shall run away.”

Alice finished laughing at leisure. Harry leaned against the slim tree-trunk on her right. She had taken off her hat; and he looked down at her brown head, and the long lashes distinct against her cheek. He reflected, among other things, that there was no better attitude for observing a girl’s eyelashes.

Her hair was brushed smoothly over her head, and gathered into a knot at the nape of her neck;

the little locks on her forehead were ruffled by the wind, and looked a shade lighter in color.

A little broken sunlight found its way through the leaves, and flecked her hair and dress with gold.

Presently she looked up, tilting her head back so that the broken lights and shadows fell upon her face. "I know you are abominably cross."

"Actually savage," said Harry, looking down at her. "It is all very well to laugh at me; but perhaps you don't know that I'm not allowed to sell the place for more than a couple of years yet. Of course, in the mean time, I can close it up and let it stand. I needn't see it again, unless I like."

"Then, why don't you do that, if you dislike it so much?"

Harry laughed. "I think it must be because I want a grievance."

Alice remained looking up for a moment. Suddenly, by some quick, inexplicable process of the mind, perhaps by the law of contrasts, her thoughts flashed back from the sunny grove and Harry's face, to Unity, the four square walls of Miss Fairfield's sitting-room, and Miss Fairfield herself, upright and angular at her sewing.



"I wish" — she said, and then stopped.

"What is the rest of it?" said Harry.

Alice shook her head. "I am afraid you wouldn't understand."

"Oh! just try me," said Harry, sitting down to have a better view of her face.

"It is rather disappointing," said Alice, laughing again; "but there is no secret. I was only thinking about my maiden aunt."

Harry laughed too. "Are you sure that isn't an original way of getting rid of me?"

"No. I never invented an original way of doing any thing. I don't care to be original: I would rather be exactly like other people."

The wind came up from the river through the trees on the sloping bank. Their branches shifted with a motion like waves, and showed a thousand shades of varying green.

A peculiar expression came over Harry's face. "I am afraid you will never be exactly like other people, Miss Dinsmore."

"I am not going to stay here to be told that," said Alice. She did not rise, however.

Harry was leaning on one elbow, and resting his light-brown head on his hand. "Don't go,"

he said, looking up. "Stay and tell me about your aunt, I mean about Unity. I should like to see a place with that name."

"Ah! there is nothing to see: that is the trouble," said Alice with a sigh. She did not feel in a particularly tragic mood, however. Unity seemed as far off as Paris, and a much more impossible sort of place.

A week or so after this, some one had the brilliancy to propose a series of tableaux.

Then Harry Ashley's mediæval inheritance came into immediate use, as there was a room in the north tower which was declared to be the very room for dramatic purposes. In addition to its other advantages, there was a stained-glass window which was to be illumined for scenic effects.

Under these circumstances several persons developed new and unexpected traits. Some of the young ladies were found to resemble romantic and heroic personages. Miss d'Etreville was chiefly remarkable for the firmness with which she declined all characters likely to cause her to appear at all ridiculous or at a disadvantage. Mr. Wilson was no longer a fatigued and middle-aged

gentleman: he was a young fellow of twenty, with acrobatic capabilities, and more knowledge of costume than any one else among them. Mrs. Winters showed a fine, true eye for color and effect, and energy and perseverance in adapting drapery and costumes.

They began to spend their mornings exclusively in the north tower, — Celia, Alice, Miss d'Etreville, Mrs. Winters, Mr. Wilson, and twenty others; all talking, laughing, commanding, advising, and arguing at once.

The afternoon of the last rehearsal, there was a violent thunder-storm. Just as the rain ceased, Alice and Miss Burton were sent up-stairs to look for Harry, who in turn had been sent for a certain Persian rug which some one had seen in one of the upper rooms.

Miss Burton was a small, plump brunette, who cherished a strong desire to pose as Queen Elizabeth.

On the stairs they met their young host, who was descending with the rug over his arm.

"You don't know what a glorious rainbow there is," he told them.

"Oh! tell us where we can see it."

"Wait a moment, and I'll take you up to my den if you don't mind the stairs."

They waited; and he came back without the rug, and took them to the den in question, which was quite at the top of the tower.

It looked very much as if Harry had retreated there from the rest of his bewildering possessions. There were photographs of actresses and racers on the walls; a tawny heap in the corner that rapped its tail forcibly when Harry ordered it to be quiet; a big chair; a desk heaped with a disorderly litter of papers, and two or three novels of the day. He glanced toward these last with an uneasy look and a quick blush.

They went to the east window; and there they saw the rain-swept, cloud-heaped sky, and a pure, vivid band of color across it.

The room had several windows, and after a time Alice crossed to the west side to look at the river. The sun shone in and dazzled her: there was a little scarlet awning outside, but it was drawn up against the wall.

Harry pulled at the rope, but it resisted firmly.

"I've not had this down in some time, and it must have rusted," he said: "I can loosen it in a

moment ;” and, with the recklessness of his age, he sprang up and out on the stone ledge, which happily was a broad one. He tugged at the iron bar, which resisted, then gave way suddenly. He staggered back a step, half a step, steadied himself by a desperate effort, and dropped in at the window rather flushed with the exertion and excitement.

He looked directly at Alice. She did not say a word ; but the color was gone from her lips and cheeks, and her eyes were full of tears.

Harry was profoundly touched and flattered ; but he had to intercept Miss Burton, who was crossing the room all in a flutter, and that occupied him for the next ten minutes. He felt a little awkward when he came back to Alice, but she made every thing easy. “Never do that again,” she said : “you have frightened away three of my five wits.” The roses had come back to her cheeks. Harry said something foolish and commonplace : he was as shy as a girl, but there was more than his usual gentle deference in his manner.

Harry’s deference was a compliment to turn a woman’s head.

If he had been older and wiser, he might have known that the feeling she had shown was too open and undisguised to be of the sort supposed. The truth was, she had a great, friendly liking for him; and her lips paled and her eyes filled at his danger, as quickly and honestly as if he had been her brother. But, pray, how was Harry to understand this or other subtleties of a young lady's heart? He was twenty-two, he saw a pretty girl with her eyes full of tears for him; and this one touch of nature did more mischief than a hundred coquettish arts and graces which he had known and passed by.

The tableaux passed off very creditably; and, within a few days after, three of Celia's guests scattered in different directions.

Mr. Wilson joined a party who were supposed to have been clamoring for his presence during the past fortnight. Miss d'Etreville went to visit friends who filled their country-house with guests until late autumn, and entertained in the English manner. Mrs. Winters was called away by the approaching fall-term of her school.

After their departure, Celia was taken suddenly ill, and did not recover her health for some time.

Through her illness Alice had rather a painful experience.

She made acquaintance with the dark, accompanying shadow of that new, strong love of life she had felt. She now felt also a chill and sickening horror of death and the grave, which was equally new and infinitely disagreeable.

Celia, who was at no time in danger, would have been possibly amused, and certainly astonished, to find herself taken as the text for a sermon on mortality; but Alice was entirely unaccustomed to sickness, and had a great, vague terror of it. The fear followed her everywhere in the house; in all the rooms with their pleasant colors, great windows, and fresh flowers. She never felt wholly free from it except when she was in the open air, with the wind upon her face, and the tangible grassy earth beneath her feet.

Perhaps it was a fanciful terror for one so young and strong, but it caused her some very real suffering.

Harry Ashley came often to inquire for Mrs. Crosby; and came from real and friendly motives, though he was certainly very willing to be received by Miss Dinsmore. Once or twice she

came down to him in her white wrapper, with her hair hanging in a braid, and slight traces of fatigue under her eyes.

In those days she grew to like him better than ever. He was so friendly, so hearty and genial! After an hour of nervous depression, there was no sight in the world so welcome to her as his kind young face and blue eyes. Harry's eyes were of a clear, distinct color, like forget-me-nots and the eyes of young children; and they had a sincere, faithful look, which may, or may not, have been a peculiarity of color.

At last Celia began to recover. At this time Alice was a great source of delight to her, and she told her so with perfect frankness.

"I am so grateful to you!" she said one day.

"Dear Celia, I have done nothing," said Alice, coming over and kneeling by her chair.

"Do you mean that you have not staid up all night, and spoiled your complexion? I should not be at all grateful if you had done that. I like to look at you. You are a beautiful creature."

"Dear me, Celia, what has become of your discretion?" cried Alice. "You never used to pay me compliments."



"You must not expect discretion from a convalescent," said the invalid. Alice went to get her some flowers.

Ten minutes after, Harry Ashley found her in the kitchen-garden, standing by the vine-covered wall. The sun shone upon it, and each leaf that caught the light was a glittering mirror: those in shadow looked dark and cool. It met the sky squarely at the top; and the pure green and the pure blue harmonized in some subtle way, beyond the power of words to express. And against this background stood Alice. The grass at her feet was full of little crimson stars. She held a sunshade in her hand, — a silk toy of some dark, indefinite color, not purple, but which, as the sun shone through it, cast cool, violet shadows on her white dress. She played with it as she talked with Harry.

Presently she said, "Do you know I am going away to-morrow?"

Harry looked at her in astonishment. "Why, that is very sudden, I mean very soon," he stammered hastily. He was somewhat confused.

"Neither, I think. I have been here almost two months."

"Can't Mrs. Crosby persuade you to stay?" said Harry.

Alice smiled, and shook her head.

"Can't *I* persuade you to stay?" said Harry.

His eyes looked full into hers. She looked at him steadily: she felt that she had never liked him so well.

Then she raised one hand with a silencing gesture, and shook her head. Harry took possession of the hand, and held it very lightly in his own.

"A pleasant journey, then," he said at last, "to Unity — and everywhere else."

He released her hand, raised his hat, and was gone. He went through the little wooden gate, and it closed with a click.

Alice went toward the house. At first she felt a little lonely and depressed, but as she went her spirits began to rise.

If any one had slighted her, here was one who honored her; if any one had undervalued her, here was one who preferred her to all others. How kind he was, how good, how generous!

"And I am good too," she thought comfortably. "I have been frank and friendly and honest with him, and I checked him kindly and firmly now."

All of a sudden a thought struck her. She ran back to the gate: there was a little round hole in the wood, on a level with her eyes, and I am sorry to say Miss Dinsmore was so undignified as to peep through it at the other side.

Harry stood there with his hands in the side-pockets of his coat. He did not look sulky, nor particularly dejected, but only thoughtful. A big, tawny dog bounded down the lane, and jumped at him with the laudable ambition of knocking him over.

"Down, Rex!" said Harry in a pre-occupied tone: but Rex tried it again, and this time was so near having the best of it, that Harry was forced to shake him off vigorously, and then to tussle with him; and finally the two disappeared up the lane in a genuine, undignified frolic.

Alice shrugged her shoulders, and walked away. "It is evident I have done little harm," she said.

She walked a few steps farther: "And it is evident my goodness was only skin-deep."

## IX.

"Love that hath us in the net,  
Can he pass, and we forget?  
Many suns arise and set,  
Many a chance the years beget.  
Love the gift is Love the debt."

TENNYSON.

It was early September when Alice went back to Unity. The air was already cool and searching, the sky high-arched and deep-blue; and the outlines of all things wore that look of sharp distinctness which is the very earliest sign of fall.

She came back resolved to cherish her new-found delight in life. If it were good to be alive and young, then enjoy youth and life to the utmost. To this end she clung, almost desperately, to simple pleasures of sight and sound and touch. In her enjoyment of them she became an innocent sensualist, a harmless materialist. She found delight in purple asters and golden-rod, and the first red leaves. A little later, when the

maples flamed after the cold nights, she gloried in their scarlet, and in the deep yellow of the chest-nuts, and the pale gold of the elms.

She took long walks over the hills to the north, to come back tired and fall asleep in luxurious warmth before the wood-fire in the sitting-room. She gloated over that fire in the lengthening evenings. She knew that its glow and brightness would be all the more welcome as winter came on : it would be a refuge from the dreariness of the months of snow.

Then came frosty nights ; and in the milder mornings after them, the frozen grass in the meadows smelt like new-mown hay. She leaned from her window to smell it, and shut her eyes to believe it was June.

One mild, springlike day she took a book, and went out to a little knoll just beyond the orchard. It was scantily set with maples : most of them were red ; but one was pale yellow, and Alice sat down beneath it, and, instead of reading, looked up at the blue sky through its boughs.

Then she leaned her head on her hand, and looked off over the meadows. They were already growing brown, and she hated the color ; but she

loved to rest her eyes on their grand breadth and space.

A man who was coming up the knoll from the road noted her figure and attitude against the sky.

He was not in a hurry. He had come back with a resolve, but he had time to fulfil it: he had come back for joy, but he was not even impatient. He noted the outlines of her head and cheek and arm, her hair roughened by the wind, and the clear fairness of her skin against her dark-blue dress.

Suddenly she turned her head and saw him. She sprang to her feet as she recognized him.

She had thought herself firm in a conviction that she should never see him again; but in the first instant of actual sight, she knew that her mind had been full of images of his coming back, —chief among them two contradictory visions, one of his coming in repentance and dependence on her forgiveness, the other of his taking forcible possession of her with no repentance nor acknowledgment at all. She was so confused by the surprise of these thoughts, and by the other, chief surprise of seeing him, that she did not

know what she did. She thought she cried out, "Why have you come back? why have you come back?" over and over again; when in reality she said nothing at all, and was going by him with set, averted face.

It was Lawrence who stood in her way, and cried out, "No, no! Don't pass me like that. Don't send me away without a word. Give me a moment, — give me a chance!"

She threw up her hands, and fell back against the tree. The rush of feeling seemed to be around her, as well as within her: it was like the noise and force of a great wind.

She gave him a chance. It was more than a chance: it had been a certainty from the first moment of seeing him.

"It is strange what imbecility a man is capable of when he flatters himself that he is behaving in a reasonable manner." Kenneth Lawrence said this about two hours later. He had been telling his story of two months past. Lawrence was a clever man, and not especially vain; but there is no doubt that he enjoyed telling his own story.

"I actually thought I was behaving reasonably

when I ran away from here, — yes, I literally ran away, there is no denying that.”

“Do you mean to say that but for me you would have refused your uncle’s legacy?” said Alice.

“Probably. You see, I had a theory that I was leading precisely the sort of life that suited me, that in fact I was fitted for no other, and — But there is no need of boring you with the rest of it. Usually a theory is one of the worst disorders a human being can have. My theory was no exception to the rule.”

Alice took up a little branch of red leaves, and played with it. By and by she held it before her face. “And I spoiled your theory?”

“Oh! spoiled,” said Kenneth. “There is not a vestige left of it. You swept it away altogether.”

“And if you had not met me, where would you be at this moment?”

“I should be somewhere in Boston, in my dingy-brown rooms probably, driving more or less heavily down a page of manuscript,” said Kenneth. He was beginning to wonder why she kept on asking questions in that odd, steady monotone.



"Then I think you had better go back to Boston — in the six-o'clock train."

"Alice!"

"I said — you had better — go back."

Lawrence leaned forward, — he was not very far away, — and took the branch forcibly out of her hands. Behind it her face was gray, and set in hard, fixed lines.

"My dear girl! why do you look like that? What is the matter? Tell me what I have done."

Alice turned her face aside: "I am sorry you came back: that is what you have done. Release my hand, Mr. Lawrence. And I suppose you think I cannot give you up" —

"I cannot give *you* up, Alice," cried Lawrence. "Are you mad? are you out of your senses altogether, that you treat me like this without a reason?"

Alice went on calmly, "But I can give you up. I have not been unhappy these two months."

"Ah! but I have," said Lawrence. "I have been wretched: are you going to send me back to that?"

Alice turned and looked at him. His face was

quite close to hers. "I do not want to be made miserable," she said piteously. "Can't you understand me? I have changed your whole life, and some time you will reproach me" —

"Do you take me for a brute?" broke in Lawrence indignantly.

Alice did not argue this point: indeed, she seldom argued any thing. Her large, gray eyes (brown-gray they were on this near view) looked straight into Lawrence's: "And I could not bear that you should reproach me, but I can bear to let you go."

"Too late, Alice, — too late."

Alice shook her head; but her eyes fell under his, the lids quivered and finally closed, their long lashes were wet.

Lawrence saw his advantage: he drew her gently towards him.

There was really no further question of the six-o'clock express.

"What nonsense it was!" he said by and by: "just as if you were not worth all the theories in the world!"

"Don't be too sure of that," said Alice saucily. "You had better not indulge any very exalted

ideas of my worth. I have no intention of setting up any such opinions of you."

"Good!" said Lawrence. "I dare say you wouldn't tell what you do think of me?"

"I think you could be terribly ill-tempered, for one thing. There is a line between your eyebrows," looking at him with a scrutinizing expression. "I never noticed it before. That is ill-temper."

"Is it a straight line?" asked Lawrence anxiously.

"Yes — no, it is turned a little to the right."

"Ah! then it is habit, not ill-temper. / Habit makes crooked, whimsical lines; time, and care, and one's disposition, straight ones." /

"Oh! I can't go on counting your faults, if you are going to have a theory for each one of *them*."

"I am glad there is something to keep you from counting them," said Lawrence. "They are not to be looked at all at once. Distribute them like shadows on a landscape, and you will see what an extremely good fellow I really am."

"What conceit!" said Alice. "Such airy, confident, self-enjoying conceit! Where did you keep

it last summer? I never discovered it." Upon the whole, he was allowed wonderfully little sentiment that afternoon. Once or twice he had the misfortune to be actually laughed at. "I dare say you are fond of me, but why do you wish me to believe it is on the heroic scale? Every woman believes by nature that there is a love greater than time, as great as death. But show me the woman who keeps her belief! and it needs no experience at all to spoil it, only a tolerably clear pair of eyes."

"What a sceptic you are!" said Lawrence. "Can't you be a little romantic on principle? You like to do what is usual, and I thought young ladies were usually romantic."

"Then, I am romantic enough to be like other girls," said Alice, "but only for consistency. I have kept my common-sense. You might think very well of me now" —

"Oh! very well indeed," said Lawrence.

"How you interrupt! And in ten years, let us say, you might think me a very poor substitute for any of your theories."

Lawrence leaned over and whispered something. On the whole, we will not inquire what

he said just then. It was not any thing at all reasonable : he had disposed of his common-sense very successfully indeed.

Alice looked at him with a light in her eyes. "Are you sure?" she said wistfully. "Are you quite sure?"

Her face shone with that look of unaccustomed passion that on a girl's face is so nearly divine.

She came back to practical matters in a moment, however. "Suppose we go into the house now. Aunt Eunice will put the blue-and-white china on the table at just the usual hour, no matter what we are talking about up here."

There was a deep, clear color in her cheeks, not exactly like carnations or roses : nothing in this world is exactly like the fresh bloom of a girl's cheek.

"I dare say you will come in to tea, Mr. Lawrence," she said, as they walked back across the orchard.

"Won't I?" said Kenneth ; "but how long am I to be 'Mr. Lawrence' ? I don't wish to be exacting, but that is the third time this afternoon."

Alice looked up. She was leaning lightly on

his arm. "I wish you did not mind," she said hesitatingly. "I would so much rather call you so. You see, I have called other people by their Christian names, some of papa's friends" —

A quick expression went over Lawrence's face, a contraction so strong, so sudden, that it looked like pain. Alice looking up saw it, and stopped short in her sentence. "That is enough," she said in a choking voice: "I understand you — fully." Before Lawrence understood what she meant to do, she slipped her hand out of his arm and ran away across the orchard.

He found her crouched down against the meadow wall. It was cold and damp there now: the mild, golden afternoon was turning chill. At first she was not to be pacified.

"There is no use in telling me I am mistaken. I am not mistaken. I understand you very well. I believe you despise me at heart. Why did you not stay away? If I were a man, I would be ashamed to come back to what I despised. Oh! if it is not I that you despise, it is my father and his friends, and the life I led before I came here. You do not like to be reminded of these things: you wish I would not mention them. Why did

you come back to me? I never tried to deceive you. I told you how I spent my life until I was sixteen, — I told you in the meadows. Yes, and I understood you even then. You wished I had spent my life here in Unity. Ah! but I have not. When I was a child, when other girls have their mammas and their schools, I was with my father: we went from city to city. I was never at school: we were never long in one place. Sometimes we were rich, sometimes we were poor. And he had friends everywhere. Some of them were creditable people; and some you would not brush against on the street, — foreigners, with demonstrative manners, and titles and jewelry that no one believed in, not even I."

Kenneth felt a faint, sickening disgust creeping over him. It was almost a physical sensation, but this time he controlled the muscles of his face.

"And afterwards some very good, respectable, charitable people took me in. They were relatives of mine; and I hated them, — hated them always; and I would have gone back to papa — oh! I would have gone back so gladly, at any time in these dull, dreadful, lonely, miserable years!"

"Dear, you shall have no more miserable years if I can help it," said Kenneth gently. "Now stand up: the grass is damp."

Alice allowed him to lift her to her feet; but at first she kept him at arm's-length, and she did not answer at once. Then she said, "I am afraid this is all a mistake. We are sure to make each other miserable at last. You have changed all your plans of life for me, and some day you will regret it."

Lawrence managed to reduce the distance between them. "Ah! that old story again," said he. "And all this for a look! Is it so very strange I do not like to hear that you have called other men by their Christian names?" (Pause.) "You have a very bad opinion of me, Alice?"

No answer: Alice was very quiet.

"You think I am jealous?"

"Decidedly," in a smothered tone against his coat-sleeve.

"Ill-tempered?"

"Rather."

"Cruel?"

"Possibly."

"Fickle?"



"As others are."

"Careless, selfish?"

"Like the rest of the world."

"Now, don't you think I have been sufficiently humbled? I feel as if I had been mentally kicked down-stairs. You have no idea how humiliated I am. I begin to wonder how you can endure me at all."

She slipped away from him with her face pink to the roots of her hair. "Suppose we go in to tea," she said, glad to return to aunt Eunice and the blue-and-white china. "You have kept me quite long enough. Dear me! what is there to laugh at?"

"I beg your pardon," said Lawrence: "nothing to laugh at, but that is a peculiarly feminine way of putting it."

## X.

“Return unto thy father’s house,  
And revel it as bravely as the best.”

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

ONE October afternoon Alice opened the door of the sitting-room, and walked in upon her aunt. Miss Eunice looked up from her sewing with an inquiring expression.

“I have been to the village,” said Alice briefly. She dropped her hat and shawl upon the table as usual, and sat down in the chintz-covered rocking-chair. Miss Fairfield’s keen, faded eyes watched her as she swayed backwards and forwards. Presently she said, “Aunt Eunice?”

“Yes, Alice.”

“I have a letter from my father.”

“Dear me!” said Miss Fairfield involuntarily. “I mean, what does he say, my dear? and I hope he is quite well.”

Alice laughed, a genuine laugh full of amusement. “I don’t believe you hope any thing of

the sort, aunty," she said good-humoredly. "And I can't see why you feel called upon to say so."

Miss Eunice had some very good personal reasons for disliking her brother-in-law, and whenever she thought of him certain terrible ideas always presented themselves to her mind. Foreign habits and customs, a life of vicious indulgence, the Church of Rome, — Miss Eunice mixed them all together whenever she thought of Cornelius Dinsmore: yet she felt obliged to say, "I am sure I wish your father well, Alice."

"Do you, aunty? I wonder if it is necessary to wish your enemy either good or ill. I suppose it is necessary for you, though. You can see black and white, but no gray."

"I don't know what you mean by that, Alice," said Miss Eunice. "Gray is my favorite color."

Alice laughed. "Will you read papa's letter, aunty?" pushing it across the table.

Miss Eunice read, —

MY DEAR ALICE [it was one of Dinsmore's peculiarities never to allude to the insignificant fact of any relationship between himself and Alice, either in the address or signature of his letters], — I dare say you have thought all manner of things of my long silence; but, as

you know, I have been down in luck, had nothing pleasant to tell, and naturally did not feel like saying civil things to any one. When a man is in that sort of mood, he had best leave letter-writing alone. Now, however, the tide appears to have turned. There is no use in explaining, but the upshot of the whole matter is, I have had a run of luck; and, if you like to come to New York for the winter or longer, I will endeavor to give you a pleasant season of it. Let me know your decision as soon as possible, as some of my arrangements depend upon it: however, if you decide to come, you may name as early a date as you like. Of course, if you like to remain in Unity, I have nothing to say against it: indeed, I leave the matter entirely in your own hands, though very naturally I hope you will come here, and join

Yours affectionately,

C. DINSMORE.

"Do you mean to go?" asked Miss Eunice, looking up from the letter.

"I don't know," said Alice listlessly. She leaned forward upon the table, and bowed her face upon her hands.

Miss Eunice laid her sewing aside, and came around from her seat at the table in a succession of quick, angular movements.

"Alice, you sha'n't go unless you *want* to," she

said earnestly. "Unless you *want* to, you sha'n't go at all."

Alice looked up. She was not crying, as her aunt had supposed. "I think I want to go," she said slowly; "but I am not quite sure."

"If your mother" — began Miss Eunice; but Alice stopped her. "Don't talk about my mother, aunt Eunice, please. If I am to go back to my father, I would rather not think of her at all."

Miss Fairfield made another venture. "If you think Mr. Lawrence would object" —

Alice started to her feet. "Mr. Lawrence has no right to object at present, aunt Eunice," she said quickly.

She took up her hat and shawl, and went out of the room. A hot, deep color suffused her fair skin; not the blush of consciousness, but rather a flash of indignation at the first — the very first — shadow of a future authority. It was not easy to imagine Alice among those who serve for love. It was her *rôle* to be served, and she did it very gracefully and well.

As she closed the sitting-room door, she was surprised to find that her eyes dwelt pleasantly on the wide hall and the narrow stairs; and, as

she went up to her room, it was still more surprising to note how familiarly, almost affectionately, her hand clung to the rail.

Would she be sorry to go, she wondered, — sorry to leave this dull, safe, peaceful, respectable shelter? As she opened her door, the chill draught met her, and she shivered in it.

This was a cold day, and the warmth of the fires below had not penetrated here. “Ugh!” she said, with a shudder, and an abrupt change of thought. “If I go to New York this winter, I suppose I shall not freeze, at least.”

She wrapped the soft heavy shawl she carried closely around her, and threw herself on the little white bed. “Ah! this is better. Now I can think comfortably.”

Alice had much to think of. In the first place, she had to deal with a very keen regret that this opportunity came so late, when the desire that had long been a part, and so large a part, of her very nature, was gone out of her life. She dreaded to miss an accustomed desire, to lose her hold on any familiar habit of thought.

She was only twenty; yet already she looked fearfully in her mind for an unwelcome maturity,

and fearfully in her mirror for lines across the smooth forehead. She had a woman's natural terror of losing youth, exaggerated by the bitter thought that thus far the years of her girlhood had been waste seasons.

Then she remembered why she no longer desired this thing. What a flood it was that had swept through her! Small wonder that old landmarks were carried away.

She sighed half impatiently, and tried to turn her thoughts to other things.

She had not a woman's common faith in love. Her scepticism was not a natural conviction, but a lesson taught very thoroughly by her observations.

And she did not set her own love higher than that of others. She yielded to its compelling force; but she did not believe that it was a thing divine, that it would glorify life to the end, even that it would continue to smooth and brighten the hardships of life, or last beyond the common measure of the love of man.

She stood apart, and looked on her own passion as one who looks on youth and beauty and vigor, saying, "All is vanity. They fade, and en-

dure not. They go down into dust and corruption and darkness."

But, after she had regretted that she no longer wished to go, she made a surprising discovery. She discovered that the old desire was not quite gone out of her life, that the opportunity was not altogether too late for her wishes. After all, the old traits were still to be found in her, though overlaid by much that was new.

She would still like to go back to her father for a little, a parting glimpse of Bohemia, a few more triumphs of forbidden violets, and admiration and flattery.

There were certainly advantages to be gained by remaining in Unity. If she remained, Kenneth could come to her, she would see him often. If she went, there was the prospect of a long, unbroken absence; but she thought, "I dare say he will do very well without me until spring," and this stirred a quick flash of pride. "And, in that case, I can do very well without him."

By and by she told herself that it was right and dutiful for her to go to her father, and then she revolted from the sham in disgust. "No, I will not make a hypocrite of myself. I am not



troubling at all about my father. My father's daughter is the person to be pleased."

Then she thought, though she was angry with herself for thinking it, that her going might vex Kenneth. She felt a great terror whenever she thought that he might some time be angry with her. It would brush the bloom from their happiness forever.

As Alice lay wrapped in the warm shawl in the cold room, she looked up through one small window-pane at a little square of October sky, and the topmost branch of a tree, yellow and fading against it. Sky through glass was a sad sight to her, for winter in Unity was little less than a horror. As she looked, and thought of all these troublesome things, the sky and withering branch began to be blotted before her eyes; and she was surprised to find that tears were quietly and steadily flowing down her face.

"Pshaw! how absurd!" she said, brushing them away impatiently. "I can do exactly as I like about it, and whichever I decide for ought to please me well enough;" but this did not check the unreasonable tears. After a time she grew

tired, and fell asleep, with wet lashes resting on her cheeks.

When she woke, it was dusk outside, and Miss Eunice was standing over her with a puzzled expression, and a lamp in her hand.

“Nothing is the matter, aunt Eunice,” she said, raising herself on one elbow, “except that I have decided to go to New York.”

Four days after this, the Eastern express was coming into New York, forty minutes late. The express had waited at New Haven for another train, and had been further delayed on nearing the city by the crossing trains outward-bound at that hour.

In one of the forward cars was Alice, looking out impatiently into the gathering grayness of the afternoon. Her doubts had resolved themselves into a very fever of restlessness. How impatient she was, with her face almost against the car-window! To arrive, to arrive! How slow they were! How time dragged! They were getting on, however.

At last the familiar tawdry suburbs, at last the advertisements of the metropolis, at last the

tunnel: the train slows, more gently, a slight jar, it stops.

People who had parcels and children gathered them up, and departed. Alice came down the steps of the car with rather an anxious expression in her wide-open, gray eyes. A trembling despondency seized her as her foot touched the platform; but then, she was always despondent in a railway-station.

She never could tell whether this was caused by distaste for the general air of petty excitement and bustle, the hand-shaking and demonstrativeness of the class that is habitually demonstrative in public, or by some peculiar and perfectly unaccountable constitution of her mind. It was depression, at all events.

Meantime she was looking about for her father; and there, not a yard away, stood a gentleman with a full, long, auburn mustache, and a pair of quick light-hazel eyes. The eyes glanced over her face without pausing; but she knew their owner, and went forward. "How do you do, papa?" she said, extending her hand.

This was Cornelius Dinsmore.

Cornelius was somewhat flurried. "Why,

Alice! How are you, my dear? Glad to see you safely arrived. Take my arm going through this crowd. Have you had a tedious day of it?"

"Rather tedious," said Alice, leaning on his arm. "We are late in, are we not?"

"Half an hour or more. My eyes are getting old, you see. I began to think I had missed of you. What have you done about your baggage?"

"Nothing," said Alice. "I couldn't express my trunk, because" —

"Because I gave you no address. To be sure. Now give me your check, and wait here a few moments."

Alice smiled as she watched him briskly making his way through the crowd. Dinsmore was of rather a burly figure, and was not, as we know, an American; nevertheless he slipped through small spaces with the utmost dexterity.

Very soon he was back again. "That is all right. Now we will go. By Jove, how you've grown, Alice!" as his girl stood up beside him. Her head was very nearly on a level with his own.

"I imagine your ideas of me had grown smaller, papa," said Alice.

As they came into the street, the air struck

warm and damp upon their faces. It had been raining, and every thing was splashed with mud. Crowds were hurling themselves in and out of the doors of the Grand Central. "Carriage, sir?" sounded right and left.

"What a nuisance these fellows are!" said Cornelius impatiently. "I have a little *coupé* engaged down here. What are you stopping for, Alice?"

"Dear old muddy, disreputable city!" said Alice, looking around her affectionately. "How nice it looks, papa!"

"Glad you think so, my dear. I should say it looked rather dirty. We are having fine weather though: October is the month for fine weather in this climate. I dare say it is cold enough in Unity by this time."

Alice looked at her father very keenly as they were driven through the streets.

Sometimes she had an uncomfortable suspicion that Cornelius was destined to deteriorate as he grew older. It was not realized as yet, at all events. He was unchanged in looks and manner, and as well-appointed as ever.

Dinsmore was certainly not unprepossessing to

look at. His bright, rather under-sized eyes were agreeably expressive; the full, heavy sweep of his mustache concealed any significant lines of mouth and chin; and his complexion was exceedingly fresh and healthy for his years. /An excellent digestion had done more toward preserving his physique than the most temperate life and the clearest conscience would have accomplished without it.

“So you are glad to come back to New York, Alice?” He was quite unconscious of her scrutiny, or, at all events, of its keenness. “Ah! you are right enough. Do you know, I have become quite a New-Yorker myself, opinions and all. I’ll growl about the streets and the weather, and any thing else you like; but let me catch an outsider at the same thing, I’m an old inhabitant immediately. I think I have been here about two years.”

He continued to talk in this manner: he was evidently in high good-temper. Alice was aware that they were going up town, she did not quite know how far. At last they stopped. She followed him from the carriage across the sidewalk, up a few steps, through a large door, up several flights of stairs, across a very narrow hall, into a

room that seemed to dazzle her with a confusion of white-and-gold.

"These are our rooms, Alice," said Cornelius.

Alice looked about her, and things gradually cleared before her bewildered eyes. The whole interior was brightly lighted, and she had been dazzled on coming in from the outer dusk.

She saw a room of moderate size, but enlarged by several mirrors. It had four windows, and was draped and furnished everywhere in white and gold. The inner room opening from this was smaller and more dimly lighted, and was all in deep, pure tones of crimson. In the middle of this room was a round white table set cosily for two.

"O papa, how charming!" cried Alice. She began to feel the color, the bold, glittering white and gold against the dusky red.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Dinsmore with pardonable complacency. "Let Lena take your hat and cloak."

Alice turned, and saw a little square-built figure, a round German face, with light-blue eyes, and tight flaxen braids wound around the head.

"Alice, this is Lena. — Lena, this is your young

lady ; and now she will command both of us," said Dinsmore pleasantly, while the little maid bobbed some strange little foreign courtesy. She seemed a grotesque toy in the pretty room. Nothing could excel Dinsmore's manner to an inferior : it was the perfection of affability, but neither condescending nor familiar.

Indeed, he had some tricks of manner which were little less than marvellous. He could wear the graciousness of long-accustomed hospitality in lodgings let by the week, or, for that matter, by the day ; and he could lend fine suggestions of ancestral dignity to newly furnished apartments. He gave orders as though he had been exceptionally well served all the days of his life : in his air was something of the benignant authority of the old squire, something of the gay good-humor of the heir coming of age. And withal, the man did not pose consciously or absurdly : it was his dramatic Hibernian temperament that constantly asserted itself.

"Now come and see your own room," said Cornelius eagerly. He was as delighted at her surprise and pleasure as a schoolboy. Alice remembered this mood of old : it was the most lovable



phase of his character. Her room opened from the white-and-gold parlor. As she stepped through the door, a rich, penetrating fragrance met her. "Oh! how sweet!" she cried. "It smells like a garden. There's some magic here. I'm afraid to go in."

Cornelius was lighting the gas; as it streamed up, she saw opposite her a little dressing-table with a great handful of heliotrope and some purple pansies lying on it, and reflected in the mirror above.

There was a heavily curtained window, a low, sloping chair, a slender white couch draped to the floor, and on it a woman's dress.

"Oh, what a lovely thing!" said Alice, running over to look at it.

It was of ivory-white cashmere, with many little frills and ruchings about the trained skirt; and, wherever their folds were ruffled, there was a gleam of pale-gold satin. And around the throat, and falling down the front, were delicate masses of creamy lace, with here and there a shining loop of pale gold.

"Princesse," said Alice, going down on her knees to examine it.

"I don't know what you call it," said Cornelius, with a boyish laugh. "I knew what I wanted, though. I told them how to make it,—told them myself, Alice."

Alice sprang up, and took him by the shoulders. "Go away," she said promptly. "I want to put it on."

She pushed him gently toward the door ; and he went laughing, and pleased with her and himself.

After a short time she came out to him all in cream-white, with a knot of heliotrope and pansies in the dainty, yellowish lace at her throat. Her hair was freshly brushed and coiled, and there were sprays of heliotrope behind her ear. Cornelius never looked at her dress.

He came forward, and took her by both hands, and drew her under the gaslight.

"Let me look at you, little girl. How you have changed ! Do you know that I scarcely knew you at first ? It was three years since I had seen you,—three years." The muscles of his face twitched slightly. Alice remembered the look. Her own face hardened somewhat.

"Yes, papa, I am very well aware that it is three years."

To part with Alice had been an act of economy and convenience on the part of Dinsmore; and, to tell the truth, he had submitted to it with very good grace: yet, at that moment, there are few sympathetic persons who would not have pitied his three-years' separation from his child. Alice was not inclined to make herself disagreeable. She had no present cause; and there were the pretty rooms, and the warmth and light, and her charming dress and fragrant flowers, and the pleasant winter before her.

"Oh! well, papa, now you can make my acquaintance. You have no idea what a charming girl I am. Shall I sing 'Jeanie Morrison' to you?"

This was a favorite song of Dinsmore's. He had a pretty taste in ballads.

"Come and open the piano for me," said Alice.

"Ah! you've grown a fine lady," said her father. "Don't I remember when you would open a piano, and climb on it afterwards?"

"Not an upright piano," said Alice, laughing. "Don't make the story worse than is true."

She sat down, and began to sing. Her voice

was a sweet, untrained contralto of very moderate compass and richness.

Dinsmore listened from an arm-chair. He felt happy and virtuous, and very comfortable.

“‘I’ve wandered east, I’ve wandered west,  
Through mony a weary way;  
But never, never can forget  
The luve o’ life’s young day!’”

The tender Scotch words, and his girl’s voice, stole in upon all that was soft and impressible in his nature. How he watched Alice as she sang! There was a mist before his eyes as he looked.

And he had not yet dined.

## XI.

"Like one that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread."

COLERIDGE.

"A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."

EMERSON.

NEXT morning Alice walked out of her dining-room on the opposite side from the parlor, and walked into a room that was Dinsmore's especial property. Dinsmore was walking about, bringing a pencil-point to a state of perfection, and scattering black-lead dust impartially over the floor.

"You wouldn't let me do this in the other rooms, Alice," he said pleasantly.

"No, indeed, untidy man," said Alice, gathering her skirts into one hand, and looking about her. She saw that the room was tolerably large, and had little in it, except a number of comfortable lounging-chairs, an equal number of light movable ones, and a couple of small round tables, covered just then with the morning papers.

"This is where I shall take my old-fogy friends," said Cornelius amiably. "I am growing an old fogy myself ; and I like my old comrades, and my arm-chair, and my own quarters, that fine young ladies like you won't interfere with."

"Is that a hint for me to take myself off?" said Alice. "I shall not do any thing of the kind ; at least, not until I've seen what your quarters are like."

She went across into the bedroom, and came out with an indignant expression on her face.

"Why, papa, it is a *closet*," she said reproachfully. "What do you mean by folding yourself up in a cupboard?"

"Just don't trouble yourself about my cupboard," said her father. "It suits me very well."

She found interference of no avail. Cornelius was not disposed to alter any of his housekeeping arrangements.

That evening he received some of his old friends.

Miss Dinsmore appeared in her white dress, and chatted pleasantly with them in the white-

and-gold room before Cornelius took them to his particular haunt.

They were not very remarkable persons. It seemed to Alice that they wore better coats than she remembered; but, on the other hand, the brilliancy which had invested all her thoughts of "papa's friends" was decidedly lacking in these actual examples. One of them, a dark, melancholy little man, was called "Count" once or twice; but he carefully explained to Alice that this was not his title, but that the others "mocked themselves at his republican principles."

Alice was a little amused by this; but, when Cornelius had carried his visitors away to whist, she sat down, and wondered gloomily if she would ever be actually bored in the midst of her white-and-gold. It was a frame of mind so intimately associated with Unity meadows.

After this it became a matter of course for her to entertain some of Dinsmore's friends for a short time early in the evening.

Sometimes it amused her to do so, and sometimes it did not; and, every time that she was not amused, she felt a fresh surprise and disappointment.

One evening she had a pleasant surprise. She had left the parlor for a moment ; and, when she came back through the dining-room, her father was talking with some one who had just arrived, — a young man considerably taller than Dinsmore. Both gentlemen turned as her dress rustled in the doorway, and the new-comer was Harry Ashley.

“I was awfully astonished,” Harry admitted ingenuously. “I don’t know why ; but I never had connected your name and Col. Dinsmore’s. I am not good at finding out how people are related.”

“Who is, except old ladies ?” laughed Alice. “We are even on that point, for I never knew you were one of papa’s friends.” Harry’s remark recurred to her afterwards ; but, at the time, she thought little of it.

She was so thoroughly and genuinely glad to see her friend, that she had few thoughts for any thing else. “It is the queerest thing in the world,” she said to herself ; “but I believe I was actually feeling a little homesick, and the sight of that delightful boy has set me all right again. I don’t know why it should, I’m sure.”



The truth was, she had begun to have a slight feeling of discontent ; and she was not long in deciding upon some substantial reasons for it. In the first place, Kenneth Lawrence was what some very modern English novelists call "difficult."

On the morning she left Unity, she wrote to him, stating her plans. She had made a convenient little rule for such doubtful cases, — "Act first, and ask permission afterwards;" but then, this was said in the old days, when no man had greater power over her than her father's very light, nominal control. Now she waited Kenneth's answer with a nervousness which it annoyed her to acknowledge.

He wrote her a charming letter, tender, delicately considerate in every line ; but Alice had a perfectly unreasonable conviction that it was the letter of a very angry man, or, at least, of a man who had been so angry, that, even when his heat was over, he found it necessary to choose his expressions with perceptible caution. And then he asked, what was most natural and proper, permission to address her father formally as to their engagement.

Alice wrote : "I do not know why I feel such reluctance to let you speak to papa. Or, rather, I do know ; and I suppose it is best to tell you. The truth is, papa will be terribly jealous ; and, when he is jealous, he is simply unbearable. That sounds very selfish, and I can't pretend to be disinterested ; yet, after all, I do not want to spoil his happiness — poor papa — when we have been apart so long. Give me credit for this much, at least. And I think I deserve a little credit for my honesty, because I have not tried to blind you with any pretty nonsense. I have told you the exact literal truth, which does not sound nearly as well. And you will let matters rest for the present, won't you ? I would so much rather ! That is my best reason, after all."

The end of it all was, that Kenneth let her have her way ; but the forced gentleness became more apparent.

"Dear me !" said Alice, "I wish his letters did not make me feel that he has just had a struggle with himself and the Devil. He has the best of it at present, certainly ; but some day he will *not* have the best of it, and then what will become of me ?"

She had other trials ; and, among them, the fact that Celia Crosby was not in New York that winter. She was spending her time pleasantly in Washington and Richmond, but Alice found her absence highly inconvenient. She missed Celia sincerely. To do her justice, she would have missed her friend even from the midst of pleasures ; but it was not in human nature to forget that Celia's presence would have given her certain social advantages and amusements that she missed sorely.

She had never cared for the society of other women, but she now began to feel the necessity of their acquaintance and support. She looked with keen envy at the groups of young girls she met in the streets. No dances and receptions for her, no pleasant formalities of calling, no discussion of fashions, no gay, gossiping small-talk. "I never have cared about other girls," she said to her father ; "but really, one cannot get on without them."

"I wish you would be careful not to use such very singular expressions, Alice," said Dinsmore severely. "Of course you care for the society of your own sex ; or, if you don't, it is not particu-

larly creditable to say so. Women should have conventional opinions, or none."

He was falling into a habit of snubbing her opinions, and Alice found it trying. His masculine roughness was hard upon her, after the unvalued peace of Miss Eunice's neutrality.

She began to suspect that she was having rather a dull winter, after all. It was hard to be so much alone. To be sure, she was accustomed to it; but then, she was so tired of it as well, and she had thought it was over at last. She thought it was harder to bear than if she had not known it so well.

Dinsmore was seldom at home during the day. His friends and his cards occupied many of the evenings, and very frequently he did not appear at the breakfast-table.

Alice had her pretty rooms and her pretty dresses, her walks on Broadway and the avenues, and sometimes a play or an opera, invariably in her father's company; and that was all.

Unless we regard Harry Ashley in the light of an amusement: she was always so glad to see him. Harry would have liked dearly to act as her escort, according to American customs; but,

at this suggestion, Alice had an unaccountable fit of shyness.

"Papa has English notions about chaperones, and such things," she told him ; "yet, after all, I dare say he would let me go with you. And I would like it myself — only — somehow I don't like — There ! did you ever hear any thing so mixed up and ridiculous and rude ?"

"All right," said Harry cheerfully. "I don't want to bother you, and I have an idea that I understand."

"If you do, it is nothing less than a miracle," said Alice. "I never heard such a mixed statement in my life. But you see it would be different if I had a chaperone anywhere in existence, even if she were not always with me."

"Yes, I see," said Harry, his blue eyes staring hard at the carpet. He looked up suddenly, and said, "Wouldn't you like to see Mrs. Crosby ?"

"Why, of course I would," said Alice. "You talk as if she were in the next room."

"Ah ! but she isn't, more's the pity," said Harry moodily.

Harry was not a letter-writing man, and he was the worst of diplomatists ; yet, when he left Alice

that afternoon, he wrote what he imagined to be a diplomatic letter to Celia Crosby.

About this time Dinsmore began to notice an unaccountable behavior on the part of his young friend. "Why, Ashley! you are nervous," Cornelius would say affably. "What do you mean by having nerves? A man has no business with them at your age." How was he to know, that, when Harry's fingers drummed restlessly on the table, they were seized with a startling desire to clutch the unexceptionable collar of his host's coat? How was he to see the blue flash under Harry's eyelids when the young man was looking at nothing higher than the floor?

If Harry had been asked for an explanation, he could probably have given no very definite account of his state of mind.

He was unaccountably angry that the colonel should be Alice Dinsmore's father, and he had had an ugly suspicion of the man of late. Harry was not ordinarily suspicious until he had been once deceived.

To Alice he was always the same. Her father and lover worried her sometimes; her friend, never. He was always kind, sweet-tempered,

genial, with that fine deference of tone and manner that touched and flattered her so keenly. "It is good to know that any one thinks so well of me," she said to herself. "I think I am improving under it. I wonder if any one was ever flattered into goodness before."

Of course she saw Harry's attitude toward her through the rosy medium which surrounds the corner of a woman's intelligence in which she judges of an admirer's attentions and relation to her.

Harry probably had no conscious ideal of her goodness. He was not a man to have conscious ideals. His behavior to her was partly an old boyish reverence for womanhood, and partly the considerate regard of a gentleman who sees a girl placed in an exceptional position, whose peculiarities he understands far better than she does, and bearing herself, as it seems to him, very well. And it was, in part, the consciousness that this girl was Alice Dinsmore: not a thought of her goodness, or her womanly conduct, or her unconsciousness, or her possible wrongs, but only of her sweet self.

Such were the springs of Harry's conduct to

Alice at this time when she so needed a friend. Not that he ever analyzed them himself, for he did not : analysis was not his forte.

By the time Alice had realized and accepted all her difficulties and disappointments in New York, the winter had worn well into January. She now felt a constant and increasing nervousness in her position.

She could not account for it, and it annoyed her. "Have I grown a fine lady, or a foolish old woman, that I can scarcely tolerate my father and his friends?" she asked herself angrily.

If the mood had been less uncomfortable, her anger would have been less. She admitted this one day, as she put on her Gainsborough hat before the glass. She never could frown at herself in a Gainsborough hat.

She had a woman's common faith in millinery ; and she considered it a pity that Kenneth could not see her in her dark furs, and her winter dresses, in rich, strange colors that fashion was just bringing into use. She had been photographed in that hat, for his especial benefit ; but she was obliged to admit that the attempt was not altogether a success.



Kenneth wrote: "It may be bad taste on my part, but I should like a little more of your face and a little less of that furry bonnet. I humbly apologize, if it is not a bonnet." Alice laughed: she did not object to criticism of this sort.

She had the letter in the pocket of the dress she wore that day. Indeed, Mr. Lawrence's letters crackled suspiciously in many of her pockets that winter. Her imagination pictured dramatic occasions when she should drop one of them out of her handkerchief, and be instantly and wrathfully called to account by her father; but nothing of the kind had happened as yet.

Something else happened to her as she was walking up Broadway that winter afternoon, — something strange, and not at all agreeable.

The beginning of it was, that she wore a charming costume, and she noticed that her very graceful skirts attracted side glances of ladylike approval. "That respectful stare," she said, "which makes one feel so comfortable."

She saw one young lady whose gaze was quite open and undisguised. She began at the edge of Alice's skirt, and looked gradually up: in a moment the gaze would reach her face. In a

moment ; but, in the mean time, Alice had darted through a convenient store-door, and stood, dizzy and confused with the rapid beating of her heart, before the astonished saleswoman.

She asked for Jacqueminot roses, but was hard to please. The silk flowers had an unpleasant purplish tinge : the others stained one's dress and fingers. She was not thinking about roses. She was thinking, "Am I out of my senses, that I run away from an acquaintance like this ?"

She had known the girl who looked at her dress for one of Celia's young neighbors of the past summer ; and, at sight of this familiar face, the dread that had been haunting her for weeks seemed to grow into an overpowering terror ; and, before she had time to reason or resolve, she had run away — from what ? From five minutes' chat with a chance acquaintance.

Alice went home rather drearily. She went to her room, and closed its doors opening into the parlor and hall, and drew her low chair into the curtained window. She never tired of looking down into the street. She had longed for streets in winter as field-loving natures long for the spring meadows.

That day the pavements were clean and dry ; the pale sunlight fell on the brick houses opposite, and the straight edges of their roofs stood out against the cold, bright winter sky.

She had walked briskly in the cold air. Her room was warm, and she soon began to feel a luxurious drowsiness stealing over the doubts and difficulties of her thoughts.

She drew one of the curtains forward between her and the window, and pulled the other around her chair on the inner side. They met in a tent-like fold over her head as she leaned back on her sloping cushions.

At odd moments, when nervous women worry themselves into headaches and dyspepsia, Alice had a queer habit of falling calmly and unexpectedly asleep, like a baby or a kitten.

She did so now, and must have slept some time ; for when she woke, and pushed aside the curtain that screened her from the window, the pale sunlight was gone from the opposite houses.

After a drowsy instant, she heard voices in the next room ; and, after another little space, realized that it was the sound of them that had roused her. Next, she thought the parlor door

must be ajar: the draught made by shutting some other door had caused its latch to spring. Still she gave no attention to the speakers in the other room.

At last a word caught her languid notice.

"Decoy?" said the deeper voice of the two.

Involuntarily she sat up, and began to listen. The lighter voice answered, — plainly a man's voice, but pitched on the shrill upper tones, — "Attraction, I should say. Like his Madeira — very good Madeira — and his Havana brand. Clever fellow, Dinsmore. Makes use of his daughter" —

His daughter! and she was behind the curtain, and the door ajar.

Alice felt her old, blind terror close in upon her with a sense of physical suffocation, with a sense that the room swung around her in dizzy circles, — circles that widened, and left her sitting still and rigid in some great, unfamiliar space.

After a moment the physical sensations left her, and she could listen again; but they were talking of something else. In her moment of confusion she had lost the connection.

The second voice went on, "Oh! Ashley can

afford it. The fellow has some shrewdness of his own, and " —

Alice pulled the curtain slightly, and its rings rattled on the pole above. The speaker did not hear it, but again she lost a sentence.

Still the thin treble voice, and this time a light sneering laugh ran through its tones. "*She* know? Of course not. They never do. There is only one thing more astonishing than what women know ; that is, what they don't know."

Alice sprang up, and pushed the curtain aside ; and this time its rings rattled loudly. There was a pause, and then heavy steps, and others, light and adroit, moving away toward the inner room.

The door of her room stood open not more than half an inch. She closed it, and began to pace up and down.

She felt like a wild creature caught in a trap. It was none the better for being a vague, familiar terror that had sprung into reality. It is bad to be beaten by a new foe ; worse to be conquered at last by the enemy we have resisted, evaded, barred out, fled from in vain. |

She was wild with rage and fright. She was stunned, confused, frenzied, at once. She was still

young enough to cry out that this could not last, that she must have help,—young enough to believe that she would have help, sure, swift, and acceptable. Help! but from whom? From her father, who had betrayed her? From Celia, who was far away? From Miss Eunice? From Kenneth! Where were her wits, not to have thought of Kenneth!

She would write to him. He would come to her: he would come at once. He would tell her what to do. This thought of his authority was as sweet as it had once been bitter.

She ran to her desk, and began to write with eager, trembling fingers, she scarcely knew what.

An intolerable shame swept over her, and blinded her as she wrote. Shame for her father, and for herself; shame that she had been blind, not innocently and nobly, but foolishly and wilfully; shame at the petty meanness, the contemptible degradation, of the whole affair; shame at what the men had said of her,—bad enough to her woman's judgment, what might it mean to theirs?

Her letter was finished at last. She would ring for Lena. No, she would not ring for Lena:

she would mail it herself. In her fevered, excited state she distrusted every one, even the innocent, stolid German.

She looked about for her hat and cloak. Then she remembered that she had left them, as usual, on a chair in the parlor — no, in the dining-room.

It did not occur to her that she could at least send Lena for these. Instead, she threw a heavy scarf of black lace around her head and shoulders, and ran hastily down-stairs. She went out to the letter-box, then back into the hall, and ran up-stairs.

She had barely closed her own door when that of the parlor opened, and steps went out, and down the stairs. Dinsmore's visitors were tired of waiting for him.

In a moment Lena admitted some one else, — some one who inquired for "Miss Dinsmore" in a frank, jolly young voice. And Alice knew the voice for Harry Ashley's.

A delicious feeling of relief and comfort rushed over her. Here was protection, sympathy, consolation, kindness. Here was her friend; all in one word, here was Harry!

She ran into the parlor, and met him half-way.

"Ah! Miss Dinsmore," began Harry gayly, and then he caught the look of her face. "Why, what is the matter? what has happened?" he asked abruptly.

"O Harry!" she said, and did not know how she had called him.

Involuntarily he held out both hands to her. She threw herself into his arms, and sobbed on his shoulder, "O Harry! Harry! Harry!"



## XII.

"'Tis well to be merry and wise,  
'Tis well to be honest and true;  
'Tis well to be off with the old love,  
Before you are on with the new."

At that particular moment Harry was probably the most astonished young man in the city; and, delightful as his position was from some points of view, it was not without its embarrassments.

In the first place, no man knows exactly what to do with a crying woman. And then Harry was instantly and fully aware that her embrace was not intended for him,—was not, in fact, a personal matter at all. And he was very conscious of the exquisite weight and warmth of a beautiful girl in his arms—and this girl, of all the world! He allowed her to cry a little without interference, and held her in a light, distant clasp.

Alice continued to sob; at intervals little shud-

ders ran through her frame, and she nestled slightly against his shoulder.

She said "Harry" again in a smothered tone, because her face was pressed against his coat; and then, "So glad you are here!"

And Harry said, "Yes, I'm here. Don't cry. You shall if you like, though. You shall do just as you like. You sha'n't be teased and worried."

It was not very intelligible, perhaps; but it was consoling, and that was better.

Harry did not apprehend any very startling cause for this scene. He had not an excitable imagination, and his little theory of women and their vagaries easily adapted itself to the occasion. Girls probably cried for unexplained and insufficient causes, and required a little vague, timely consolation. If he could chance upon the acceptable sort, it was all right, every thing was all right.

After some moments she lifted her face, small and white in its frame of black. "How good you are!" she said disconnectedly. "How kind and sensible! Any one else would ask questions, and vex and bother me."

Harry looked down at her steadily. His blue eyes were very kind and clear.

She bowed her face on his shoulder, and again the light trembling motion ran through her figure.

"Something terrible has happened," she said distinctly.

In spite of himself Harry started perceptibly. For the first time he connected her agitation with the ugly suspicion that had haunted his own mind. His quick, comprehensive thought was, "Dinsmore has behaved like a rascal."

Instantly Alice raised her head and looked at him. "What is the matter?" she cried in a shrill, high voice. "What do you know about my father?" Then, with a quick, violent movement, she sprang away from him, and ran and flung herself in one corner of the sofa, rocking to and fro, with her face hidden in her hands. "Now I have told you all, — every thing, every thing!"

Harry took half a moment to find his scattered wits. Then he came over to her. "Miss Dinsmore."

She sat still, and began to listen.

"You have not told me any thing, remember that: I understand nothing at all."

She sat quite still for some time. By and by she looked up out of her handkerchief, and made an unexpected remark: "You might sit down. It doesn't improve matters for you to stand in the middle of the room."

Harry sat down, but he did not reply. He delicately refrained from urging her confidence, and aside from this he had nothing to say.

After a time she put her handkerchief away altogether. She made an effort to look at him quietly and steadily; but her color fluttered painfully from white to pink, from pink to white.

"You must think me out of my senses," she said piteously. "And I *can't* explain to you: I wish I could."

Meantime Harry had been thinking to some purpose. He leaned forward, and laid one hand on the little gilded arm of her sofa. "Suppose you let me explain to you?" he suggested.

Alice stared. "Oh, do!" she said eagerly. It was pleasant and unexpected to have this painful process of explanation taken out of her hands.

Harry hesitated; then he raised his clear, boyish eyes to her face. She found time to think

how blue they were, though her mind was so full of other things.

"It is all supposition, you know ; and very likely I shall make blunders, and say something disagreeable. Shall I go on?"

"Oh! yes," said Alice: "go on."

"Then, I am supposing that you have heard something that annoys you, — some rumor, nonsense, about — well, about your father. Shall I go on?"

Alice had winced noticeably, but she said, "Go on," though in rather a fainter tone.

"It is awfully awkward," said Harry; "but I suppose I must go on now. Let us say, for instance, that you have heard I am losing at cards to the colonel, — Col. Dinsmore." He was getting hot and nervous under the self-imposed task.

"Yes!" said Alice. "Oh! do go on. Is it true?"

Poor Harry made a desperate attack on the very downy fringe that adorned his upper lip.

"It is of no consequence, if it is true," he said, averting his eyes; "but — I don't see how I can get on with this, I'm sure. I feel like a puppy already — but what I hope you understand — what

of course you understand—is, that it is all perfectly straight—on the square—all right. I mean, that Col. Dinsmore has been at the game rather more years than I; and, if he is the better player, it is very natural. It would be a strange thing if he were not. I hope you understand what I am trying to get at.”

Alice stood up suddenly, and laid both hands on his shoulders, almost forcibly preventing him from rising. “Why, of course I understand,” she said sweetly. “How good you are!”

Harry blushed redder than ever. “Well, that is a turn I did not expect,” he said, standing up as she released him. “I should not have been surprised if you had turned me out of the house. But you see, I thought, if you had been hearing some nonsense with no truth in it, it was better to tell you the truth, even if I had to refer to the other, and that was awkward; and I’m sure it was. I never was so badly scared in my life.”

His words gave Alice a great—indeed, a disproportionate—relief. Was this one of the ideas she had made into such horrible, torturing spectres?

How she had magnified and distorted them!

how small they were on a clear and reasonable view! What a relief it was to see them through that practical masculine judgment that women value so highly!

What he said was too pleasant to be doubted in any respect. If at some future hour she were to doubt it, why, so much the worse for that future hour.

"I had worried myself into a dreadful state of mind," she said, passing her hand over her forehead. "I am glad you talked me out of it."

"I am going to ask another question," said Harry. "Where did you hear all this?"

"I suppose you want to know who is to blame for it," said Alice, looking up at him. "I don't see what good it would do for you to know. The gossip is usually a woman, and then what can you do about it?"

"Ah! but if the gossip is not a woman?"

"Even so, in these days you can't call him out for talking about—my father." She narrowly escaped a slip of the tongue, and colored high as she finished her sentence.

Harry was not to know the worse half of her story: indeed, she herself was trying to forget it.

"No, I can't," said Harry. "I shall not make a spectacle of myself. But I think I could persuade him to find some other way of passing his time, beside talking malicious nonsense. You see, I can't have you annoyed in this way, if it can be helped."

It would have been good to see this young fellow, with his fresh-colored, boyish face, and his air of elderly wisdom and protection; his blushes and his awkwardness, and his fine manly chivalry, that he would never have called by so grand a name.

Alice shook her head. "You can't always hinder my being worried. I don't think you can hinder it now."

"Couldn't Mrs. Crosby straighten matters for you?" asked Harry.

"What faith you have in Mrs. Crosby!" said Alice, smiling. "So have I, but unfortunately she is in Richmond."

"Not Richmond, Philadelphia now. And she is coming home next week," concluded Harry triumphantly. "That is what I came to tell you, when you frightened—that is, I was so surprised"—He stopped short in confusion, be-



lieving he had said the most awkward thing imaginable.

Alice looked at him an instant with sparkling eyes, then she suddenly burst out laughing. Harry stared. "I know I behaved shockingly," she gasped, when she could speak; "and it is shocking to laugh now, but it *was* funny. I am so glad Celia is coming home, and she will settle matters for me if any one can; and I have been lonely and homesick, and frightened about every thing lately. But I must laugh: it *was* funny."

She went off with another ringing peal, and left Harry still bewildered.

Not that he was stupid; but her behavior was undeniably surprising, and then these side-lights on the main question puzzled him. A subject was serious, or it was not serious, just as day was light, and night darkness. His moral vision had a tendency to translate most things into distinct, primary colors.

At last Alice stopped laughing. "I *am* glad Celia is coming home," she said. "How did you hear of it? Did she write you? Did you write her? I believe you have something to do with it."

"No, upon my word," said Harry. "I heard it from Miss Burton," having a lucky recollection that Miss Burton was in town.

Harry told his little fiction with a look of conscious rectitude and innocence. Blonde and cherubic children wear the same expression when they are questioned in regard to the sugar-bowl.

"I am glad she is coming back, for any reason," said Alice. "Have you any thing else nice, to tell me?"

She sat down upon a chair whose narrow carved back rose above her head. Harry took one of the Queen-Anne chairs opposite.

"There is something else, but I don't consider it nice," said Harry. "It is a bore. I have got to go across."

"Across?" echoed Alice, "just what, for instance?"

Harry laughed: "The Atlantic this time. I mean, I have to go to England." He paused, and looked at Alice: her eyes looked at him without responding, and she did not speak.

He went on, "You see, last spring I fell in with some English people, friends of mine; that is, I have known Frank Dillingham four or five years.

He brought his mother and sisters over here, and then by the last of June he wanted to go back again; while the ladies wanted to stay and run about the States this winter, with some American connections of theirs. And I thought of going over in the spring, so of course I offered to look after them. Now Mrs. Dillingham wants to go back a month earlier, and she takes it for granted that I am going too. I suppose I am," added Harry ruefully: "I don't see how I can avoid it."

"You are meeting the common fate of the good-natured American," said Alice coldly. "You are being made useful. You can't avoid it."

Rising from her chair as she spoke, she went over to the long mirror, and began to unwind the black lace from her head and throat. In her haste, she had tied it in an inextricable knot, just behind the ear. She pulled it impatiently this way and that, with her arms raised, and her hands behind her head.

Suddenly she turned, and looked fiercely at Harry.

"You don't wish to avoid going. There is no reason why you should."

Her life and thoughts were full of graver issues than his coming and going, and yet she could not spare him. She was fond of him, she leaned upon his gay young companionship and his honest friendliness, and she could not spare him. She was in a blind, impatient rage, like the fury of a child whose undisputed possession is taken from it.

Harry sprang up, and came over behind her: she saw his young, flushed, eager face in the glass.

"Don't," she said quickly: "I mean, don't scold. I know I am terribly cross."

She was still struggling with the black scarf, and Harry took it out of her little cold hands. She let them fall at her sides with a sigh of relief.

He had a certain skill in handling the buttons of gloves, and soft wools, and laces like this. It was unexpected and incongruous somehow with his broad shoulders, but women liked the small services all the better on this account.

"Why, you were drawing this tighter. I thought girls understood these things," he said. He was quiet enough, but for the light in his eyes and the boyish color in his face. He said noth-

ing more until he had untied the knot, and dropped the lace from his hands. Then he said quite softly and quickly, "Tell me not to go, Miss Dinsmore. Tell me to stay, and I won't go for all the Dillinghams in England; I won't go for the world."

Alice started, but not away; and she looked up in his sincere, pleading eyes, his fair, fresh face so near her own. Through a whirl of confusion, some things grew plain to her,—that she was sorry if not surprised, that she feared she was a little triumphant, that she did not mean to deceive or play with Harry, who was so manly and so true to her.

At this moment she glanced in the mirror. She gave a startled cry, and put her head down on Harry's shoulder, and clung to him with both hands; from fright, from trust, but not from love, or the treachery of a coquette.

Harry's arm closed around her instantly; but he too looked in the glass, and saw there a face.

It was the face of Dinsmore, shrewd, cool, handsome, with an unhandsome sneer around the auburn mustache.

Alice could never clearly recall or account for

her own part in the moments that followed. A strange slowness and dulness seemed to possess her mind. Observation was unclouded; but she was slow to reason upon what she saw, slower to act upon her own reasoning.

She knew that Harry placed her gently in a chair, that he crossed to her father in the door, that Dinsmore said something in a sarcastic tone which Harry answered in a grave one, and that finally they went toward the inner room together, Dinsmore's dramatic sternness rather losing in effect against the new, youthful dignity of his companion.

In a very short time she heard the closing of the farther dining-room door, and Harry came back alone. By this time she thought it was possible to act.

She rose, and went a little way towards him. "You surprised me so," she began abruptly: "I did not know" —

Harry looked at her, his kind young look, only with a new gravity in it. He always seemed singularly young to Alice, and this time there was a touch of pathos in the thought.

But she did not yet tell him of her engagement.

"I did not mean to take an advantage of you," he said.

"Oh, no!" she said quickly, and put out her hand, not quite knowing why she did so.

Harry took it, but with no air of possession; and they walked down the room toward the mirror, he holding her small hand in that light, impersonal clasp.

"I did not know" — she began again helplessly.

He looked down at her. "I thought you knew — last summer."

"Ah! that was why I was so sure."

Harry looked as if he did not understand. The situation was hard upon him in all respects. His wooing had been completely robbed of romance and the eloquence of impulse, and he had no natural eloquence to supply in its stead.

He released her hand, and stood off a little way. "Will you give me an answer when I come from England? I shall come back in the next steamer."

"That is so soon," stammered Alice. She meant to speak of Kenneth Lawrence.

Harry's face clouded. "I dare say you don't

understand," he said gently; "but it is rather hard on me, going away at all."

"I do not mean to be selfish," she said slowly.

He smiled. "Tell me to come back in the next steamer. You need not promise any thing."

"Oh, yes! come back," she said mechanically. It seemed to her that she could say nothing else.

He still looked at her with controlled eyes.

"Now I will go," he said at last; "but I shall not leave the city until Mrs. Crosby comes. If you should want me, you will send, won't you? To your old acquaintance, you know."

"Oh, how good you are!" said Alice for the third time.

"Don't. I can't stand it," he said quickly. "I dare say you don't understand that either. You will send?"

"Oh, yes!" said Alice gratefully.

"Thanks. And now good-by."

"Good-by, Harry," she said holding out her hand.

"Ah! thanks once more," he said as he took



it. And then he looked at her rather wistfully, but she did not seem to understand.

In a moment he was gone, and she remained standing in the same attitude, with her back to the mirror and its glittering reflection of the white-and-gold room.

## XIII.

"She had no gratuitously ill-natured feeling, or egoistic pleasure in making men miserable. She only had an intense objection to their making her miserable."

GEORGE ELIOT.

THE events recorded in the last chapter happened on a Wednesday afternoon, and on Friday morning Lena came in to her young mistress with the card of Mr. Kenneth Lawrence.

Alice was sitting before her little toilet-table. She saw Lena's square, German-blond reflection in the swinging mirror, and dismissed her without turning away. For a moment or two after the girl had left her, she sat quite still in the same position.

It was her misfortune never to have to deal with a simple emotion in regard to Lawrence.

She was very glad to see him: he had come to her quickly, promptly, as a lover should, and of course she was very well pleased; but at the same time she was a little embarrassed and uncertain what to do with him.

She no longer wished to tell him the whole of her story ; indeed, it did not seem possible to do so : yet successful concealment looked more impossible still. Withal she was always a little afraid of him, and yet she was so very glad he had come. "He can't begin being terrible at once," she thought, rising before the glass. And then she looked at her charming image.

She wore the dead-white dress with its suggestion of pale-gold satin and its creamy lace, and a knot of purple violets at her breast. She was a woman who wore flowers quite informally.

"Ah ! I don't think he can be terrible at all."

She stood a moment in the little angle of the hall, between the door of her room and the door of the parlor. Afterwards she always associated a peculiar stage of nervous uncertainty with that little dim angle of the hall.

When she opened the parlor door, she only remembered that she was very glad to see Kenneth.

Lawrence was standing before the draped, unused fireplace. This was a sign of his controlled nervousness. He would have liked to walk about the room, he found it morally impossi-

ble to stay in a chair : so he compromised by standing on the hearth-rug, and vibrating mentally.

When Alice opened the door he very nearly rushed across the little room ; and, though he began with "My darling," he followed it instantly with, "What has happened ? What did you mean by your note ?"

Alice drew away to the distance of half a yard. She was bitterly mortified and angry.

"Nothing important has happened, after all," she said dryly. "I am afraid I have been very foolish. I am sorry I did not tell you at once."

She did not stop to estimate the anxiety which conquered even his epicurean delight in her. She did not in the least appreciate her power in drawing from a super-subtle nature this perfectly unmixed feeling.

Lawrence was experiencing another unmixed feeling.

He looked at her with a surprise that belonged to both halves of her sentence.

"Why, do you know what you wrote me ?" he demanded. He took three or four letters out of the breast-pocket of his coat, and hastily shifted them in his hand.

Alice looked at him with increasing displeasure. Her passionate excitement belonged to the day before yesterday, a remote epoch to which she had no desire to return.

"I have not the least idea," she said, in answer to his question.

Lawrence looked up at her tone, and recovered his usual perception.

He dropped the four envelopes, and took her hands in his. "Why, Alice!" he said tenderly. "What did I do? Did I frighten you? Was I rough with you? You don't know how you frightened me. You frightened away all my observation: I could not even see how I was behaving myself."

She allowed herself to be drawn towards him. In the step she made, she trod on two of the dropped envelopes. They were thick, and made themselves felt through her thin slipper.

"Ah! well," she said archly, after a moment; "I never undertook to like you without your observation."

"And now tell me what was so terrible," said Lawrence. He picked up the letters, and stood up with an inquiring expression.

Alice looked at the envelopes. "Let me see what I wrote you," she said.

He held out a cream-colored note.

"Let me see the others," she insisted, laughing. "I ought to know what sort of company you give my letters."

Lawrence handed them to her with an air of mock resignation.

"I don't care about the yellow envelopes," said she; "but what is this? It looks uncommonly like a young lady's handwriting; and *I* never wrote such a neat, trim little address in my life."

"Ah! she wanted my autograph," said Lawrence. "You see, she was not aware that I had resigned my public capacity,—supposing I ever had a public capacity to resign."

"Do you mind that?" asked Alice, with a quick, grave change of tone.

"Being asked for my autograph? Ah! if you knew how I like it," he said, straightening himself and assuming an air of complacency.

"Pshaw!" said Alice. "You are absurd enough. I dare say your young lady was absurd too." She gave him back the note.

"No, she was not absurd," said Kenneth, put-

ting it away. "She was a young woman of taste and intelligence — naturally."

Alice still held her own note in her hands: she was crumpling one corner of it, which she looked at without seeing.

She looked up at Kenneth with a sweet, uncertain expression. "Do you mind finding nothing has happened?" she asked, her sensitive color changing. "I mean, do you mind being sent for just because I was foolish?"

"'Just because,'" echoed Lawrence, with a lover's folly, a lover's wisdom, ah! yes, and a lover's argument. "What do you suppose I would like to happen?" he said teasingly. "Do you think I came here to enjoy your misfortunes, whatever they might be?"

Alice turned away with a little, impatient movement. "Come over to this end of the room," she said abruptly, going over to the little brocaded sofa. "I always like this part of the room best. Just my fancy: it is not really prettier or uglier than the rest."

Lawrence took the chair with the carved back: there was very little of it to be seen above his head.

Alice took her note out of its envelope, and read it with an air of making its acquaintance. She put it back again, and handed it to Lawrence without looking at him.

"That is very confused," she said abstractedly.

"Yes," said Lawrence. He did not use the interrogative inflection, but his tone had all the insistent quality of a question.

Alice looked at him almost as if she were unwilling to do so. She said slowly, "And now you want to know what all this means."

"Why is there any objection to my knowing?" said Lawrence, in profound astonishment.

"Of course you have a right to know"—began Alice.

"Oh! my right!" he interrupted with a kind of impatient disgust. He felt that he had really behaved very well. The next step would be, to feel that he would behave well no longer.

This step he had not yet taken.

"I do not mean to insist on any rights," he resumed more quietly.

He stood up beside the chimney-piece: he could resist the impulse no longer. "I came here fearing to find you in trouble,—in some very serious



trouble," he said. "Satisfy me that nothing of the sort exists, and I have no questions to ask."

Alice still felt that she must go on. She had not ceased to feel compelled since the interview began.

She also rose, and came over to the low mantel, and stood leaning her right hand and wrist upon its edge.

"I had heard something terrible," she said in a low voice. "It was not true. You must understand that it was not true. It was about my father."

Lawrence was aware that he controlled his face admirably.

"It was bad, disgraceful. But it was not true."

Lawrence laid his hand heavily upon her wrist. She went on speaking with an effort.

"It was a scandal—about cards." She stopped and began to tremble violently.

"It was not true," said Lawrence soothingly; not that he believed the comforting assurance.

He did not feel obliged or inclined to investigate the intricacies of Dinsmore's conduct.

"There is worse to come," said Alice faintly. "My name was mentioned."

"Your name!" cried Lawrence in a deep, rough voice. "How mentioned? Tell me what was said, Alice. I can't stand this!"

"It was said" — began Alice. She stopped helplessly. "Must I go on?"

Lawrence made a quick, impatient gesture.

"It was said that — I — was useful to him, — to my father; that I — was — an attraction."

Lawrence checked himself in an exclamation, — a violent one. It was characteristic of the man that he instantly added, "I beg your pardon."

He did not regard his ejaculation as a cry out of the depths, but as an oath used in the presence of a woman; and he felt proportionately disgusted at having used it.

He had taken his hand from her wrist, and started away from the mantel.

He started into one of his conventional attitudes, — an attitude like the portrait of a gentleman, except that the gentleman's head was bent so as to give a very imperfect view of his well-drawn features.

Alice stood still. She felt very helpless and neglected, very young and ignorant. It was one of the occasions that took from her her sense of

experience in life. Was this the way one's lover behaved in a crisis?

Lawrence raised his head a couple of inches.

"There is but one thing to do, Alice," he said deliberately. "You must leave this place at once."

"The story was not true," Alice explained once more. It had become a matter of necessity with her to insist upon this. She was never quite certain to what point she believed it.

"Exactly what do you mean by that?" asked Lawrence. "Is it not true that your name was mentioned?"

Alice sat down before she answered. "Yes, my name was mentioned," she said in a low voice.

Lawrence looked at her, gloomily at first, but his expression gradually brightened. "You do not appear to understand the matter. I am very glad you do not," with unmistakable fervor. "But of course you understand that I cannot have these things said of you."

"Of the woman you mean to marry," said Alice; but she said it very quietly. She stood up again, and said, "Do you wish me to go back to Unity?"

"Yes, for the present, that will be best." Lawrence broke this up with a succession of little pauses. He was apparently going through with some more complicated process than forming his sentence.

Alice looked at him with dry, bright eyes.

"Well, I do not mean to go back. I know now that I never mean to go back. This is what I came for," with a gesture that included more than the room in all its glittering white-and-gold. "It may not be very good, but I shall stay."

At the moment it seemed very bad to her, — very tawdry and dreary and lonely, infested with humiliations and disappointments.

"Dear, why should you go back to Unity?" said Lawrence. "There is something else to do. You have promised to marry me: marry me to-day, instead of in three months. There was never a reason for waiting, and now there is every reason why we should not wait. There is not a presentable scruple in the way. Marry me to-day, Alice: why not?"

Alice looked at him with the same dry, brilliant gaze. "Thank you for offering me the alternative," she said gravely.

"Good heavens!" cried Lawrence in his astonished voice. "Can I urge you like an operat-  
tenor? I can't imagine any thing more brutal —  
under the circumstances."

Alice blushed deeply. She began hastily, "Now you are" — but she suppressed the adjective.

"You ought to know that I will not marry you in this way," she said. "I may not be a person of romantic views. I do not think I am. But I do not wish to make my wedding-day a matter of convenience. I do not wish to marry you in this hasty, unthought-of way, because — it is impossible for me to stay in my father's house." Her hot, shining eyes suffused with tears.

"Don't, don't," urged Lawrence in his somewhat conventional tones of distress. "You shall do as you like — exactly as you like."

Alice brushed her tears away. "I wonder if you mean to make conditions with me?"

"No, no," protested Lawrence. "Do I not say you shall do as you choose?"

"Suppose I choose to remain here?" said Alice quietly.

Lawrence frowned. "It is impossible," he said

with his deliberate gentleness. "I cannot imagine it."

"Extend your imagination," said Alice: "I mean to remain here. I do not mean to go back to Unity. I do not mean to marry you to-day." Her eyes gave one passionate flash. "I do not mean to marry you at all."

She went on instantly, excitedly, "If I marry you I shall be a miserable woman, and I will not be miserable. I have a right to my happiness, I have a right to escape from misery in any way that I can. I am afraid of you, I always have been. I am afraid of the sacrifice you made for me, I am afraid of the day you will repent it; I am afraid of your fineness, I am afraid of your strength. I am afraid of your ideal; not of me, not of womanhood, but of the woman your wife must be. I am a small creature. There is nothing deep or strong or brave in my nature, but I have been good enough to you. If you made me miserable, I should be worthless and vicious. If you frightened me, I should lie to you; if you baffled and suppressed and thwarted me, I should do worse. I am afraid. That is what sets me out of your reach. You cannot argue with fear. No one can, you least

of all. You know nothing about it: it is too gross, too simple, too ordinary. You had better leave me. I will not be made miserable."

"*I* make you miserable!" cried Lawrence. "Alice, I love you."

She burst into tears. "Oh! if that were an answer to either of us! If I could look at life for one instant like that!"

Lawrence took a step towards her, she raised her left hand. "Oh, no!" she said with the one visible sneer she had used. "Pray retain — your good taste."

It was enough: Lawrence never knew exactly how he got out of the room. In truth, he made the exit of a hero of melodrama.

The uncomfortable suspicion of this aggravated whatever he felt of rage and pain, and the baffling sense of loss and defeat.

Alice stood still after he had left her. She noticed two little strips of sunlight that fell between the window-curtains upon the floor, and she remembered that it was still very early in the day. It was an impossible sort of time for any thing important to happen: there was no æsthetic fitness in the hour.

She noticed that the sun brought out some slight, vivid touches of blue and crimson in the amber and fawn and wood-colored carpet.

She had never observed those tiny circles of color before.

They seemed to rise in the sun, and dance before her, — little rings of blue and crimson dancing in two narrow, dusty bands of light.

By and by she heard her father's step upon the stairs. She thought she would like to avoid seeing him; but from some unaccountable dulness and heaviness that had taken possession of her, she was standing in the same place when he came in.

"You are looking pale," he said in a tone of personal injury, "pale and sallow. I wonder why you don't go out of doors in the morning? Women never take care of their health."



## XIV.

“And ye shall walk in silk attire,  
And siller hae to spare,  
Gin ye’ll consent to be his bride,  
Nae think o’ Donald mair.”

CELIA CROSBY arrived in New York early in the following week.

The evening of her arrival, she received a call from a young gentleman who stood in the unfortunate predicament of being about to sail for Liverpool, while he had serious and absorbing interests in New York. He did not take a tragic view of the situation, however,—he was not a person of tragic views; and Celia only discovered how serious the interests were, through his very ingenuous discretion.

“At least I may wish you a prosperous voyage,” she said as he was leaving.

“To Liverpool?” he said, regarding her with his agreeable gaze.

"No," said Celia smiling: "from Liverpool to New York."

"Ah! thanks," he said gravely. "That is better. From Liverpool to New York."

But he went away with his jolly smile, and his air of having whatever he liked in this pleasant world.

Next day Celia paid an early visit to Alice Dinsmore. When Alice came in, her friend received a genuine shock. In those few days she had grown perceptibly thin and pale, and a pathetic violet tinge showed under her eyes.

"My dear girl! what has happened to you?" said Celia in dismay.

Alice smiled rather dismally. "A great deal has happened, and I mean to tell you all of it: so you had better take off your cloak."

She told her story, sitting on a sofa-cushion with her head in Celia's lap.

Celia was very well aware that something important had happened. This much she had gathered from Harry's diplomacy by letter, and his later reserve of speech; but it was beyond the cleverness of woman to divine the affair in detail, and Harry himself had no idea of the episode of Mr. Lawrence.

Alice did not suppress that. "I am determined to enjoy the relief of telling you every thing," she said, "even if I am horribly sorry for it afterwards. I am not a confiding woman usually, but I feel the necessity now."

After she had finished, Celia stroked her hair a few moments without speaking. Then she began to speak in her gentle, ordinary tones: it was such a comfort to Alice to hear any one speak in an ordinary way!

"Now, my dear, I have a proposal to make. Don't be alarmed: happily I am not a gentleman. I want you to come and visit me for a time."

Alice looked up with her wide gaze. "*You* think so too?" she said rather piteously.

"Of course I think so," said Celia. "I don't see why I should frighten you, but I see what you must do. I like your society very much. Come and pay me a visit."

When she left she said decisively, "I shall call for you this afternoon. Let us say five o'clock."

It was necessary for Alice to tell her father of this arrangement, and it was also distinctly disagreeable. She found him in his room, where she went an hour after luncheon.

Cornelius was at his desk. He heard her statement with perfect good-temper. When she had finished, he stood up, and put his hands behind him, and assumed the unhandsome sneer.

"So you are going to visit Mrs. Crosby," he said deliberately. "That is very nice, and Mrs. Crosby is very kind, but — exactly what does this mean?"

"Nothing remarkable," said Alice with a sort of tremulous flippancy. "So few things do."

"Ah, very likely!" said Cornelius. "This means a few trifles, however. I don't like it, for one thing. Of course you are aware of that. And if you go, — mind, I have nothing to oppose to it, — I hope you have considered some — ah — permanent arrangement? Because I have a fancy you won't return here. I don't at all like your going, you know; and — the fact is, I've a devil of a temper. I should be sorry to be disagreeable to you, Alice."

"I do not mean to come back," said Alice almost in a whisper.

"So I supposed, and very proper of you," said Dinsmore looking at her steadily with his light-hazel eyes. "Very proper indeed. Of course I might inquire why you are going. I have a little

curiosity on the subject, but I shall not insist. Generally I don't insist, it is so seldom worth while. I suppose you have some notion in your brain. Women are ingenious in notions—not malicious ones. I dare say it would not interest me especially. And of course I might complain somewhat on my own account if I liked: I don't like, however. I think I have treated you very well. I believe I have not abused you. It is coarse to speak of what one does for another's happiness, but I believe you have had most of the things women like. We won't speak of it, however: I have no desire to complain. I might pose as an injured man, you see; but I am not in the habit of posing."

He kept the sneer upon his face, and held out a couple of fingers to be shaken.

In some way those fingers held her fast for a moment, and he looked steadily, steadily at his daughter's face.

All at once he threw his left hand up before his eyes. He had burst out crying like a woman. Facile, surface tears of his temperament and his race! Alice knew their value well, but her own nerves were too unsteady to bear the sight.

She turned away blindly, and left him standing there. She went out of the door, and closed it after her.

She did not see him again.

After this came the prosaic business of packing her trunk. She had never been so impatient of its petty, tiresome vexations : evidently the great concerns of her life did not shut her out from the small.

Her hands trembled so that she could scarcely fold her dresses, — her pretty dresses in the rich, strange colors. She overlooked one of them by some means, and had to raise the heavy lid of her trunk again to put it in.

At last she sat down, and cried like a child over her childish troubles.

After this she put on her hat and cloak, and went into the white-and-gold parlor for the last time. The curtains were dropped before three of the windows, making the room dim ; but through the fourth, a side-window, some yellow rays slanted into the darkness.

Alice fancied they had the soft look of spring in them : the day seemed misplaced from April.

She wandered about restlessly, seeing her own figure repeated in the mirrors.

She thought she would never remember the room as empty. If she thought of the mirrors, she would see this dark, moving figure of a girl. In the mirror over the mantle she fancied she saw her own profile and that of Kenneth Lawrence, both sharply and clearly drawn.

By and by Lena spoke with some one at the outer door, and then brought a message to Alice, "Mrs. Crosby's carriage waited : would Miss Dinsmore come down ?"

"Miss Dinsmore would come down at once ;" but she dismissed Lena, and closed the door of the little dim, gay room.

She knelt down by one of the little gilded chairs, and rested forward upon her crossed arms.

She did not know how long she remained there. She had not meant to linger, she was quite ready to go ; but she felt dizzy and tired, faint with the heat of the room, and confused with the images in the mirrors.

After a time, — she could not tell how long, — the door opened, and some one came in.

A faint scent of hyacinth came in also ; a woman's heavy skirts rustled near her, and a cool, ungloved hand was laid upon her own.

She looked up and saw Celia, then she rose to her feet. "I meant to come down," she said in a confused, apologetic way.

"Come now, dear," said Celia, still holding her hand.

On the stairs, through the halls, and into the street, she kept that small, hot hand in her own.

At first it seemed to Celia that Alice was changed to an incredible extent. Very soon she discovered that the appearance of change was caused by a number of superficial habits, which were as unlike the girl she had known as any thing well could be.

Alice had developed a timidity and a reserve which were in direct opposition.

She seemed to be unable to bear solitude, and to dread observation. She learned to retire behind books that she did not read, to shade her face from light that was not physically disagreeable, to put a cautious cheerfulness into her voice, and to move with premeditated briskness.

She was quite frankly unhappy: that was not what she was trying to disguise; and she was living reasonably under it, — better still, she was



trying to outlive it as steadily and intelligently as possible. But she had not accurately surveyed her state of mind, had not measured its breadth and depth. It is probable that she never intended to do so: she would certainly not allow this liberty to another.

She told Celia that she did not deserve any large measure of sympathy. "I am not as unhappy as you think: perhaps I am not unhappy at all, in the way you think."

Celia was a woman who believed in silence, but not in silence invariably. It was not easy to discover Celia's invariable beliefs.

"It is not that I think you are so unhappy," she said. "It is that I want to tell you something."

She waited a moment, and then broke out with her rare, very rare, impulsiveness: "I want to tell you that you have not met with a loss such as you think. You never had so great a thing to lose. There is no exceptional life, such as girls make for themselves in their thoughts. Do I not know? When I was most happy, I thought that was supreme, the world had seen nothing like it; and when I was most miserable, I thought that

was supreme too, and there was a degree of consolation in thinking so. But it was a mistake,—it was all a mistake. I had met with a very common fate. To be sure, I had made my dreams around a coarse creature, but that was all. It was a pity, but it was not very remarkable. My husband was not a deliberate villain, and I was not a creature under an exceptional curse. • I was simply the victim of my imagination,—it was so large. I do not want you to be the victim of imagination, to regret what seemed to you a possible life. I tell you it is of all things impossible.”

Alice looked at her wistfully, but then her eyes were of a wistful color. “I have not believed any thing like that,” she said. She added gravely, “I wish I had.”

“Ah! I know that stage too,” said Celia. “There is a time when a belief like that for the world seems better than any personal happiness.”

The strange revival of passion was beginning to die out of her; and she added with a smile, “But, after all, we can’t do without personal happiness. That is precisely what I want for you.”

“I have never cared about having a belief for

the world," said Alice. "Perhaps my chance of personal happiness would be all the better if I had."

At another time she asked Celia how people recovered from a serious experience. "I suppose this is a serious experience. It is not so very bad, though it is bad enough; but I do not want to be changed by it. I do not want to be made serious, or to have large, sad ideas. I have lost one or two figures out of my view of life, and I can spare them; but I want to keep my own place. If I was frivolous before, I want to be frivolous now: I do not want to advance. I want to keep my comfortable, narrow thoughts, and my strong sense of my own personality, and to feel that I am in the centre of my world. I want to feel young."

"I do not think you will advance too fast," said Celia. "We go forward by a sort of ebb and flow, if we go at all. There is a good deal of retrograde movement in any kind of progress. One of the strangest things in life is the way we return to our old ideas. We call them by different names perhaps, and we do not believe in them quite so firmly; but it takes a great deal of

re-christening and modifying to get them finally out of existence. I suppose I ought not to tell you all this: you will be more likely to resist the movement when it begins."

"Ah!" said Alice, "I couldn't do any thing much younger than that."

Next time it was Celia who spoke first. She said, "Alice, what do you mean to say to Harry Ashley?"

"I do not know," said Alice. "I think I do not mean to say any thing."

"Ah! that is a decision," said Celia.

Alice took up the conversation twenty-four hours later.

"I suppose you mean, that Harry will wait no longer for me," she said thoughtfully. "Well, I can't in reason expect that he should."

"Harry is a faithful lover," said Celia; "or rather, he will be faithful to you if you allow him. If you do not allow him, he will go and be faithful to some one else."

Alice rose, and came over to where Celia sat. She knelt down, and hid her face in her friend's lap. "I can't, Celia," she said incoherently. "I know what you wish, and perhaps it is best for

me, if any thing is best ; but I can't do it. It is too soon : it is inhumanly soon."

Celia waited until Alice had slipped from kneeling to sitting on the floor. She kept her hand upon the brown head. "What else do you mean to do, Alice?"

"Ah! that is the question," said Alice. "I have no intentions : I never had any. I believe I told Mrs. Winters so last summer. I thought it a fine, spirited thing to say. I know a few of the things I ought to do, however. I ought to consider Harry as representing an establishment. And of course a girl in my position accepts the first establishment that kindly opens its doors to her."

"There is no question of your position," said Celia quickly, in spite of the requirements of her discreet policy. "If you will stay with me" —

"Ah! but I won't," cried Alice, catching Celia's hand, and bringing it down against her cheek. "I am not so helpless and contemptible as that. No. Just at present I come to you, and I lean on you, and I cry at you, and I let you do as you like with me, because I feel like a log, all heavy and dull, and drifting with the current ; but some day

I shall be a human being again, and then I will do something, — I don't know what, but I will not throw my weight on you forever."

Celia lost sight of her politic attitude altogether. "Why, Alice, I want you," she said impulsively. "Child, I have always wanted you: I wanted to beg you from your father years ago; but then I was afraid, the responsibility was so great. But I can take you from fate as a free gift."

Alice shook her head. "No. It is impossible. I have some intentions, after all, you see. They are all negative. I will not stay with you. I will not go back to Unity. I will not marry Harry Ashley. Celia! I am not quite twenty-one, I am strong and healthy, I am cleverer than most girls, I am far cleverer than half the stupid boys: is there nothing I can do in this world except to marry as a refuge? Can't I keep a roof over my head in *any* other way?"

"Yes, you can," said Celia. "It is possible, and it is honorable; but — it is not amusing. You would not find it amusing to make dresses or trim bonnets, or even to teach children the alphabet or scales on the piano. It is one of these things

that you would have to do. They tell me that the world has advanced, — that there are new occupations for women, new interests in life. I do not know. This working problem has never touched me personally, and I am ashamed to say that I do not know. But there is only your case before us at present, and I know that you are no better fitted to deal with the world than your grandmother was. Perhaps you are not as well fitted. It is true that you are clever ; but it is that fatal, unguided, diffusive, woman's cleverness. It has no channel : it is of far less value than the trained stupidity of the boy."

"You say, 'It is not amusing,'" said Alice. "I deserve to have you say that : I have always wished to be amused. But is it amusing to marry, — to have a roof over one's head?"

"Alice, you are not being forced into this marriage," said Celia. "If you do not marry, and do not go back to your aunt, and if you will not stay with me, I will help you to do whatever you can. I cannot promise that it shall be whatever you like. Child, do you think I would urge you to marry any one, if you could remain as you are at this moment? When a girl says she

will not marry, she thinks of putting duties and cares and responsibilities away from her. She thinks of being always young, and of always resisting her lovers. She never thinks of the day when she will no longer be required to resist. I do not deny that I wish you to marry Harry Ashley, but I use no unfair means. I speak to you with perfect frankness and sincerity. I show you all my motives: they will bear the light. I know that you will wish to marry at some time. It is usual for women to marry, and you will wish to do what is usual. This is a common motive with women, but it is a passion with you: you always desire to be as others are. And you will have other motives. There is a strong womanly nature that some day you will feel. There is a weariness, and a dread of loneliness, that will make themselves into great terrors. And, if you are to marry any one, why not Harry as well as another? Better than another. I tell you it is the opportunity of a life-time. I do not pretend to overlook the substantial advantages he can offer you. They have their just and acknowledged value. You prize them, and so do I; but I would not force you upon a boor, or upon a



vicious man, or a brutal and violent. Harry is a gentleman; he is kind; as men go, he is good. He loves you sincerely. You will find no truer gentleman, no kinder heart, no more honest and wholesome nature."

Alice leaned her roughened brown head against Celia's knee. Stronger than ever she felt the drifting of the current.

Among the soft forces that urged her on were the pleasant images that sprang up in her mind whenever she thought of Harry.

To think of him was to picture something always young and gay and friendly; to see blue summer skies, the little breezy grove above the river, the sunny kitchen-garden with its green wall, and the cool-tinted rooms of Celia's country-house.

She had always craved some actual, tangible happiness; but, in her dark days, the wish took on a passionate insistence.

Formerly, in her unhappy hours, life seemed to stretch out before her in an endless gray vista; but now, in her quickened consciousness of material being, when she was miserable, old age and death seemed to close in upon her, and she felt

a shuddering desire to snatch some happiness, some success, some meaning from life, before she was hurried into their awful grasp. She reached out of her apathy to this desire.

Might it mean happiness to marry Harry Ashley? She did not know.

Meantime February slipped into March. Celia was doing all that wise woman and short time could do. She never worried Alice; but she forced her softly and steadily, by all that she did, by what she said, and what she did not say.

She led her into placid and pliable modes of thought. When the first warm days came, she sent her out into the open air, and always in dainty spring toilets.

"There is a great regenerating influence in a new dress," Alice said one day "There is the philosophy of having pretty toilets for church. It is easier to be devout under a becoming bonnet."

Celia looked at her, and forgave the flippancy. Her special attribute had been bloom; and now it was coming back to her,—something at once ripe and delicate, the freshness of an apple-blossom, the perfection of a peach.

This was one of the prophetic March days. Seasonless Broadway seemed almost abloom.

There were softened outlines, even of cold brick and stone, through the warm air; there were courageous light dresses; there were children selling bunches of great, sweet English violets, and pansies, gold and amber, purple and mauve, —ragged children they were certainly, but they no longer shivered, —and there was the light-blue, cloud-flecked sky overhead.

Alice bought a bunch of violets, and fastened them in her dress. As she looked up, she met the eyes of a gentleman who was regarding her not quite in the usual Broadway manner.

It was all over in a moment. She had blushed, nodded, and made a little, indistinct murmur of salutation. She was walking up Broadway beside Harry Ashley.

She stole little, observant side-glances at him. He was a good deal sunburnt, and his eyes looked bluer than ever.

He had a knot of violets in his buttonhole. He had the old prosperous, sunshiny atmosphere about him.

There never was a less formidable companion.

Harry's behavior was most cheerful, common-place and re-assuring.

Apparently he had enjoyed crossing the Atlantic in the stormy season. He had enjoyed the society of the English ladies, though Alice fancied them of the heavy and stolid type. He was incorrigible: he enjoyed every thing in life.

In this mood he continued until they reached the very door of Celia's house.

And then,—why was he in such a hurry? Why couldn't he wait? It was flattering, but highly inconvenient.

He said, "Shall I come in?"

Alice looked down at the door-mat,—a most prosaic object.

The door-knob turned within.

Alice said a single word: "Yes."

## XV.

"She was possessed by a spirit of general disappointment. It was not simply that she had a distaste for what she was called on to do : the distaste spread itself over the world outside."

GEORGE ELIOT.

IN her youth, Celia Crosby had had a distinct girl's ideal of herself, and the life she meant to lead ; and, being a woman with a sense of irony, as she grew older she was often made to smile, in a delicate, satirical way, at the un-ideal situations in which she found herself.

Her smile was never more delicate nor more ironical than when she came to play the part of interposing Providence in the fortunes of two quarrelling lovers.

"Ah ! but I don't quarrel, you see," objected Harry.

Of this pair, it was Harry who stood closest to her, who heard her admirable counsels, and felt her personal force.

"You don't mean to say that Alice quarrels?" said Celia, bluntly for her.

"Oh, no!" said Harry absently. Presently he waked up to the enormity of the idea.

"Miss Dinsmore does not quarrel," he said punctiliously, and with one of his clear, direct looks. "Of course not. But there is something in the air." He looked down, and pulled his mustache. "There is something very uncomfortable in the air." And, to tell the truth, there was.

In the beginning, it was the very natural change that came over Alice's thoughts of Harry when she came to regard him as her accepted lover. It was a great change that he had left the vantage-ground of being an injured man.

It had never been easy to pity him. He was too stalwart and fair and broad-shouldered, physically, just as he was mentally too sturdy and cheery and firmly balanced. Yet it could not be denied, that, in a certain sense, she had injured him; and though she was not a cruel woman, nor a foolishly vain, in spite of the frank tribute she paid her own charms; and though she would have been the first to say prettily, and it

may be with sincerity, that the man who failed to win her missed of little worth the winning, — this idea had for her a subtle, potent charm. Yes, she had not been able to resist the egotism of pitying Harry, and she had not been hard or cool or subtle enough to evade the fascination of her own pity.

The sober light of day is trying to any person-ality after a glamour like this.

“I am extremely glad Harry is happy,” she said, in the early days of her engagement; “but he need not walk about this world like a dancing-bear.” This was a shallow sarcasm, and it had the exasperating grain of truth that shallow sarcasms usually possess.

The very worst that could be said of Harry was, that happiness had made him a trifle clumsy. He certainly carried his head a little higher than usual: his air of good fortune was a trifle more noticeable, and he had a boyish disposition to overload his betrothed with presents and attentions.

There was not one grain of ostentation in his nature. There was no taint of vulgarity in his natural and lovable wish to make some practical expression of his happiness, and his fondness for

her, and to begin to make her life bright and smooth, and exceptional in delights. Alice acknowledged that there was not, but she could not help feeling oppressed.

There was, so to speak, too much substantial splendor about her, too many roses, too much authorized and inevitable devotion.

She saw with wonder how life seemed to stretch before Harry as a holiday stretches before a child, not because he had visionary and impossible views of happiness, but because he had a practical and realizing sense of his own advantages, of his youth, and even, in a limited degree, of his sunny, fortunate nature.

His views of life were chiefly plans for spending his holiday. He meant to travel: he was sure Alice would like to travel.

Harry had a suspicion that he had not travelled, even though he had seen Europe in the rapid American manner.

There was certainly some other way of going about the world, some other way of seeing sights and places. Alice probably knew the other way. He meant to take her to Italy. She would like Paris, of course; every one liked Paris: but there



would be something exceptional in her liking for Rome. True, many people liked Rome ; but in Alice's liking would be something distinctive.

He would have liked to induce her to talk a little about these things, but she was not inclined.

She said she would like to go to Rome ; and then she said she would like to go to Chicago, when he asked her immediately afterward. And he saw the incongruity, and she did not.

There were other things Harry wished to talk about. One of them was the unfortunate mediæval Rock, — not that Harry called it the Rock in speaking of it. He made no particular pretence to culture, but he had an idea that Alice would prefer a country-house of greater architectural sincerity. "Architectural sincerity" was not the term he used, however.

This subject of conversation was also a failure.

"She seems to think it in bad taste to talk much about houses, and ways of living. She won't talk about any thing of the kind. It seems to give her an idea of a flashy, middle-class, new-people sort of style, that she doesn't like. That is, if I catch her idea : I'm not sure that I

do. People talk a good deal about houses and furniture, though. They call it Household Art." (Something in Harry's accent expressed the capitals perfectly.) "I don't call it Household Art, but I can't see how that alters the matter. I want to find out what she likes. I don't see how I am to get at it unless she tells me."

Harry was a trifle more garrulous than usual in those days. His perplexity seemed to have loosened his tongue.

And then he had a new expression,—two unfamiliar wrinkles across his forehead, and a shadow that actually seemed to cloud the color of his pleasant eyes.

Whenever he looked like this, Celia felt disproportionately distressed. It appalled her to think that this might foreshadow his marital expression. Her feeling about Harry was probably a little exaggerated and morbid. He seemed to stand so close to her. She fell into the habit of saying "My boy," when she spoke of him to herself.

A chord was ajar somewhere in her being,—a chord that is tremulously sensitive in a childless woman of Celia's age and nature. He stood so

close that his figure seemed to hide Alice from her view.

Alice also was a good deal perplexed. One of the first causes of her perplexity was a whimsical, trivial sort of wonder that took possession of her, — a wonder at the strangeness of her position.

It seemed so strange that she had promised to marry Harry Ashley! It was suddenly so strange that she could promise to marry any man!

A half-forgotten phase of her girlhood rose before her, — that period of imaginary revolt known to a high-spirited girl in the sharpness of her first insights. Alice had had insights into so many things, from her girl's standpoint, and the sense of aloofness that it gave, — into life, before its serious concerns had lost their impersonal air; into the destinies of women; into marriage.

Alice had thought very highly of these insights. In a certain sense, she thought highly of them still. They might be a little crude and narrow, — her keenness had the usual tendency to shoot into rays; but they were precocious, they were clever, they had the sharpness of truth.

Their one fault was, that they had no practical

use. She felt this with a sense of strangeness which was not as yet a sense of pain. She was like one travelling to the West, provided with accurate maps and guide-books—for a journey in the opposite direction.

One by one her judgments and opinions came and looked at her, — opinions on life, on the destinies of women, on marriage.

Something she had said of married women recurred to her with especial clearness, — “They are happy in a way I should not care for, and they are unhappy in a way I should find intolerable.”

She could summon sufficient hopeful egotism to imagine herself among the happy, but how if the happiness proved of a burdensome sort?

She pictured the unattractive figure of a woman grown heavy and commonplace, both mentally and physically, under the burden of matronly, domestic bliss; and she shrugged her straight, shapely shoulders at this homely future-self, just as she shrugged them at a corresponding picture she had formed of Harry, — poor Harry! quite unconscious in his youth and his bonny good looks. She imagined him grown ten years older,

and developing a strong resemblance to his father. To be sure, she had never known the elder Ashley; but she was illogically certain of objecting to the resemblance.

One day she had a new sort of prophetic vision suggested by a visitor of Celia's.

This lady was handsome, animated in manner, and fashionable in dress; but she had one or two peculiarities which were not admirable. Her youthful costume, exquisite in itself, required her to sit with her back to the light in order to preserve the harmony of her appearance; and, when she wished to emphasize a phrase, she made an ascending scale of her sentence, and concluded with a little shriek on the highest note she could reach.

Celia said she had had a late success in life, and it had made her a little vulgar.

Alice wondered if early success ever had a like deplorable effect. Was it a choice between this and the prosaic matron? Was this the consequence of a taste for luxury, and a passion for society, and, above all, for social success?

When Alice wished her life to resemble the lives of others, she thought always of lives the most successful, admirable, and complete.

She desired of the earth, not the rude odor of the soil, but the delicate, conventional perfume of violets.

These were wishes ; but the very phrase, "like the lives of others," proved her lack of the robust confidence necessary to imagine herself a fortunate exception. It was easy to depress her with the idea that her life would be dreary or wearisome or commonplace, just as it was easy to convince her of many of her faults and absurdities. Her imagination filled in outlines with surprising rapidity.

It was her whim to see in Celia's unconscious acquaintance another future-self at the climax of her career. She made a little pen-and-ink sketch of the vivacious lady's figure, to which she added her own face grown older ; and she regarded it with quaint serio-comic terror which was not without a grain of genuine seriousness.

One day she showed the sketch to Harry. If she had expected him to laugh, she was disappointed, though Harry usually chose to see the element of comedy uppermost ; not because his sense of humor was so overpoweringly strong, but because he feared the absurdity of being serious in the wrong place.

But he did not laugh at the sketch.

"That is what I shall look like when I am forty years old," said Alice.

"Well, I hope not," said Harry bluntly. "I don't see why you should, I'm sure. I should like" —

"Yes, yes, what would you like?" said Alice impatiently. Sometimes it was an imperative question this, what Harry would like.

Harry looked down at the slip of paper. "That is just what I want you to tell me."

Somehow the tall, broad-shouldered fellow looked oddly helpless to Alice, — helpless between the little pen-and-ink woman and herself. It rushed over her with a sense of generous shame and remorse, that she was imbittering for him the sweetest, the most ideal, relation in life.

She laid one hand on his light-brown head. "It is a pity you are so fond of me," she said irrelevantly.

Harry made an uneasy movement. "It is a pity you see it in that light."

He found an excuse, and left her rather abruptly after that. He wanted to get into the open air.

His kind, sunny temper was subject to sudden

brief, sharp gusts ; and, for once, he felt dangerously near saying something rough to Alice.

He came back next day in a different mood.

"I haven't much to say about principles, and that sort of thing," he said, leaning against the chimney-piece. "They are heavy to carry about ; but, for all that, I don't intend to behave shabbily, if I am aware of it. It has struck me—it has struck me a good many times lately, that I might be behaving shabbily to you. If I am, I wish to know it. I always think one of the most contemptible things a man can do is to worry"—Harry stopped abruptly—"to worry a girl into a promise. If I have done that, I wish to know it. And if I could make you happier—by keeping out of your way altogether"—

Alice looked at him with a kind of fascinated terror. She had never for a moment contemplated breaking her engagement.

This marriage might be unwelcome, but what else was left for her ? Celia's words had bitten sharply into any vague ideas of singleness and independence. If she were not a dependant on charity, she must trim bonnets, or make dresses, or teach little girls. It would not be amusing.



She would be lonely and weary. She would grow old and unattractive. When it was too late she would wish to marry; "because it was usual for women to marry, and she would wish to do what was usual."

Her imagination rapidly sketched the details. She felt sinking, sinking in an unexpected void.

She slipped her heavy, brilliant ring into her right palm. "Perhaps this is better," she said, in a faint, proud tone. "We will assume that it is." She held the ring toward Harry. He closed her hand over it.

"We won't assume that," he said sturdily. "We'll never assume that, unless it is so sure it can't be helped. I did not mean that — that I'm not the luckiest fellow in the world, to win you on any terms at all." Alice looked up at his flushed, eager face, — his kind young face!

The end of it all was, that he put the ring back again.

She was rather gratefully submissive. This world might be more or less uncomfortable, but she had no desire for chaos and the deluge.

When Harry came out into the hall, he stood a moment by the stairs, and looked up with a

thoughtful expression. It was quite permissible for him to go up-stairs, and knock at the door of Mrs. Crosby's sitting-room ; but this he was reluctant to do.

As if in answer to his wish, a door opened above ; and Celia herself came out, and began to descend the stairs.

He began to talk about indifferent matters. "Why did not Mrs. Crosby have a white owl for the library ? All the ladies had white owls. He could get a fine one for her, or rather Gleatzner could get one. Gleatzner was an old German, a queer fellow. He had a little hole of a place, in an out-of-the-way street down town. Mrs. Crosby should see the place. Birds alive and dead, aquariums — was that what you called them ? And " —

By this time they had reached the end of the hall opposite the little reception-room on the right. A light chair stood across its threshold.

Harry sat down abruptly, and dropped his head into his hands. "Mrs. Crosby, I wish you would find out what is the matter. I can't stand this any longer."

By the time Celia came in to her, Alice had made an unexpected resolve.

"I am going back to Unity," she said abruptly. "Not to stay,—oh, no! I wish to take a little journey,—a little pleasure-trip in the spring weather."

"There is no worse place for you," said Celia. "But of course you will do as you like."

Alice looked at her with rising excitement. "Yes, for once as I like. You have always ruled me by telling me I should have my way: now I mean to have it in spite of your permission."

## XVI.

"Not always can flowers, pearls, poetry, protestations, nor even home in another heart, content the awful soul that dwells in clay." — EMERSON.

ALICE had her way to the extent of going back to Unity, — she did not stop to think how strange it was that she should desire to go back, — but, if she had intended to appear in the light of doing something remarkable, she was not allowed to fulfil this portion of her intent.

Celia assumed that it was very natural that she should visit her aunt. It was a tribute both to affection and convention, on the eve of her marriage : it was very amiable and very proper.

And, if Harry did not fully share this view, he was persuaded to seem to share it ; which was as good, or as bad, for Alice.

So she went away in a misty, gray morning, with a feeling of shamed regret at last. It was a little too much like going back into exile : the

glory of her independence had taken to itself wings.

She shook hands with Celia on the platform, and with Harry in the crimson-velvet interior of the car. Celia looked collected and friendly, — Alice would have said noticeably so, only “noticeable” was a violent word to apply to Celia, — and Harry had something of his old air of cordial good cheer.

Alice wondered whether he had assumed it for the occasion, as he brought her the tea-roses, and the light, newly published novel; or whether he thus ingenuously acknowledged that her little absence promised to be a comfortable arrangement for all. “In five years he will be extremely glad to have me take little journeys,” she thought. “My poor Harry!” This idea entangled itself with her recollection of his frank, genial face and his blue eyes.

The gray, soft sky overhead seemed to settle heavily after noon; and, when she left the express at Westfield Junction, a fine, dense rain was falling. At dusk, when she stepped out on the narrow platform of Unity Station, the rain had become violent, and a wind had risen that howled

around the flimsy little building in gusts like November.

For the first bewildered instant she stood still, hearing the train go puffing and hissing up the grade; feeling that wind and rain were beating upon her, that her heavy skirts were wrapped tightly around her ankles, and her wet veil drawn across her face.

Before she could clear the veil away from her eyes, some one was addressing her as "Miss Dinsmore."

When she could see, she looked at the substantial, ungainly person of Mr. Luther Jones.

Mr. Jones was one of Miss Fairfield's neighbors, and he had come to drive Miss Dinsmore down to the farm. He said "Miss Fairfield wanted he should." The New-England fellow-citizen is not sent upon any occasion: his services are "wanted," and therefore he goes.

Alice objected to Mr. Jones. It was probably not his fault that his hair and complexion were of the color of brick-dust, nor that he was christened Luther and nicknamed "Lute;" but Alice considered the circumstances unpleasant.

On this occasion, however, she was very glad

to see him, and to reach the shelter of his covered buggy. She addressed customary inquiries and civilities to the back of his head, as he leaned well forward to drive a sober animal called "the colt."

She saw how square and white the houses looked, as they drove through the village. The thin, young foliage of shrubs and trees was almost invisible in the wet, gray twilight.

Well, the barrenness and the primness of the village, and the crudeness of the late spring, were so many local influences; even Mr. Jones was a local influence, which was certainly a point in his favor. She came for local influences, if she came for any reason at all.

Night was beginning to close in when they stopped at the gate of "Fairfields."

Mr. Jones lifted her down with awkward carefulness; but the edge of her skirts detached some mud from the wheel, and two little cold, sticky rills trickled inside the trim tops of her boots.

She ran up the gravel-path, and knocked at the front-door. The storm swept her against its white, streaked surface. She remembered oddly how hot it had looked last July, and how malig-

nantly the great glass door-knob had glistened in the sun.

She knocked on the panel again with her slim, gloved hands. No one heard.

Still again, and yet no answer. Her knuckles tingled under the kid.

She sprang down from the step, and ran around the corner of the house. The soles of her shoes were drenched in an instant: the short grass held an incredible amount of water. The meadow-wind met her, and well-nigh drove her back.

At last she was at the kitchen-door, her hand was on the latch; it resisted, clicked: the door flew open.

She sprang in; and with her came a wild gust of wind and rain, a handful of torn petals from the nearest cherry-tree, a dash of mud from her dress and cloak.

Miss Eunice started up from before the oven-door. "Sakes alive! you've brought in the river-meadows!"

Alice burst out laughing. Wet and cold and tired though she was, the drollness of her aunt's reception was stronger than any thing else.



And Miss Eunice was really glad to see her niece, in spite of the unpromising character of her welcome. Alice knew that, as well as she knew why the unseasonable fire was lighted in the sitting-room, why there was peach-jam on the tea-table, and why Miss Eunice went *before her* with a lamp into the neat, bare room up-stairs. She was touched by the little concessions to her fancy, and grateful for the homely services, as she could not have been grateful a year before. She had a new sense of the sweetness of the common kindnesses of life.

When Miss Eunice left her, she shut the door with a sense of refuge ; a sense certainly not of happiness, nor of peace, — for her perplexities had as much force as ever, — but of a security, if only for the moment, that was very sweet.

A peace penetrates, where a refuge simply infolds.

Alice slept very soundly under her security and her bodily fatigue. She fell asleep to the sound of the rain upon the roof.

When she woke next morning, the storm had ceased. She went to the window, and looked up into a gray sky of infinite depth and softness, not

bright enough to dazzle, not dark enough to have the color of gloom.

Below, the orchard was all wet and blooming. The cherry boughs were white under the window, and farther off the apple-trees were flushed and dappled with pink. Alice looked down through the drenched blossoms at the drowned grass.

She dressed hastily, and ran down-stairs, through the kitchen, out into the orchard.

She gathered up her skirts, and stepped daintily over the wet turf, trying at each step to grasp the sense of spring: it had eluded her while she sat occupied with her own concerns.

The season had passed before her like a pageant, with its fresh wind and sunlight, its new life and color; and she had looked on with half-shut, careless eyes.

Now she tried to see what she had missed in the rosy boughs of the apple-trees, in the solid white of the pears covered with compact, snowy clusters, and the broken white of the cherries, whose bloomy twigs were thick-set with young leaves.

She fastened some half-blown sprays in her belt, and went into the house. Miss Eunice

looked at them dryly, and scolded Alice for going out into the wet orchard, not to mention bringing mud in upon the clean kitchen-floor.

Alice did not mind what she said. At least it had a familiar sound: probably it was a local influence. It slipped into her sense of security of the night before.

This was a Sunday morning. It was White Sunday, Miss Eunice said, as she stood in the doorway dressed for church.

"What is White Sunday?" asked Alice, who was not dressed for church.

"It is the Sunday when the fruit-trees are all blossomed out," said Miss Eunice. She added half-absently, "It comes when it's sent." And then she went down the straight gravel-path.

Alice sat down upon the door-step, and thought of this saying of hers. It was rather fine. "It comes when it's sent." "Sent," in the significance of the Puritanic mind and faith,—that austere faith, exact, personal, and exacting.

By very force of contrast, her mind went back to that religion whose impressive manifestations were associated with a certain period of her childhood. Between that imperial church, gorgeous

alike to adherents and aliens, inscrutably complex in its scheme, studiously simple in its requirements, and this belief of New England, Alice had passed untouched by either.

To the latter she was scarcely accessible. It was too stern, too narrow and colorless: it offered no allurements. Faith is a creature of wings, and Alice's only winged thoughts lay in that impressible portion of her nature which imperatively required to be allured.

There were means and expressions of that other faith, that might have moved her with incalculable force, — a *Gloria* breaking out of silence; a marvel of color between inner dimness and the light of heaven, a ruby saint, a golden glory, a Christ risen in the suffering majesty of a violet mantle; a gray cathedral aisle; a dark, conventional figure in the half-light between two worlds. None of these potent influences reached her, and she was not made to feel the capabilities and dangers of the phase through which she was passing.

Insufficient as her experiences may seem, — and it was now possible for her to acknowledge them essentially small, even while she felt their effect as great, — she was trembling on the verge of that

state of frenzied exaltation and excitement, which, though a result of human passion and suffering, is often mistaken by women for a spiritual ecstasy and devotion.

While she sat on the door-step the sky gradually cleared, with no ostentatious sweeping-away of clouds, but with a brightening from gray through grayish-white into whitish-blue. At last the sun came out fully. The day had grown very warm.

Alice went into the sitting-room. The windows were open, but the light came in cool and sobered between the green slats of the blinds. The fireplace was closed, and the hearth swept clean.

She sat down in the chintz-covered rocking-chair; and looked at the four square walls, at the geometrical group of portraits, at the braided mats on the floor.

The room was everywhere plain, clean and square; but for her there was everywhere the same sweet sense of refuge.

A limited and moderate pleasure this, but sweet — sweet and dry, like the scent of withered rose-leaves. It would not last, and Alice knew that it would not; no more than the spring-day would

last, or the apple-blossoms, or Miss Eunice's solitary flash of poetry about White Sunday. She knew that the old loneliness and dreariness would return, and the sense of security would be as behind iron bars.

Very well : in the mean time this other sense was pleasant.

After noon she went into the orchard again, and, for the first time, went over to the meadow wall.

The grass was still wet, but the flat, rough stones on top of the wall were hot in the sun. Some apple-blossoms and scattered petals had drifted down and withered upon them.

Alice leaned against the young tree from which they fell, and others drifted down upon her head.

A sickening pang seized her as she thought of the summer of a year ago.

It was not regret, not shame — that common shame — at having given her experience a larger name than it deserved, calling what was false real ; but rather shame that what was real had shaken her so slightly, that so hot a fire had already fallen into ashes.

Was this what became of all things, — alike of

love and hate, of passion and indifference, of happiness and unhappiness?

It had been easy to say "All is vanity," of the phases of her nature, as it is trite to say, "We must all die;" but when she saw sinking out of her life, a desire, a joy, a pang, that yesterday had life and heat and compelling force, the phrase came home to her with some reflex of the significance of that other phrase, as it comes to those for whom it has the awfulness of a personal meaning.

She felt a despair of life and of herself; her desires, her struggles, her attainments; an impotent rebellion at being carried with the great tide that passes, — passes.

"I am not content to pass away 'like a weaver's shuttle!' Those metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide that smoothly bears human life to eternity."

Her insistent consciousness of material life had passed into that other consciousness of living, which is not material, but which yet so moves the senses that it scarce escapes the term of sensation.

She overlooked a strong reason for the rapidity

and completeness of the changes that had taken place in her.

It was that the present was full of perplexities, which, having their life in that of the moment, of necessity loomed large before her, shutting out the things of a year ago. A hand before the eyes shuts out the whole horizon-line.

But the question the weightiest and the most urgent, that came to her oftenest and staid longest and most persistently, was, What would Harry require of her?

It was easy to say that he would require only herself, but what manner of self could she offer him? A discontented woman, unhappy and therefore unpleasant?—a disillusioned nature, which he would like none the better for an imperfect comprehension of the term.

True, Harry was not accessible to sentimental wrongs; but there were practical wrongs to which he was extremely accessible,—to a peevish temper that would jar upon his own wholesome one, to an indifference that would damp his pleasures, to a sullenness that would darken his home and his table, to a caprice that would offend and scatter his friends.



Alice began to have an agonizing fear that she should make him miserable.

This was a step forward, — from the fear of unhappiness for herself to the fear of unhappiness for another.

And there was no personal element in her fear, as there had been in that old fear of Lawrence's sacrifice, of Lawrence's patience that she could not trust.

She did not fear that Harry would revenge upon her whatever he missed or endured, even through her faults.

If there were harsh or ungenerous or bitter traits in his nature, she never saw nor suspected them. No images of darkness connected themselves with his name.

She thought of him as kind, cheery, and gentle; she thought of his likable air of confidence, and brisk delight in life.

There was something generous in her admiration of him, — this gay, generous lover, whom she did not love.

And yet, after all, there was a grain of personal feeling in her fear of making him unhappy.

It was the fear of a penalty. It was a fear that

she had seen in her mother, under the stern name of retribution.

Poor Ruth had felt the very terrors of the law launched at her head. The unhappiness of her married life was to her the penalty of disobedience ; and for every act of hers that erred against the severe code in which she had been reared, she feared a direct and literal punishment. And this her mind, morbidly alert, never failed to discover in the many trials of her life.

As children share a serious belief, Alice had shared this. She could remember when she had trembled at the thought of certain small, childish sins, and had wondered whether she would die of a fever like one of her playmates, or—and this was worse—whether she would fall on the hot stove, and scar her face.

Some shadowy menace of the idea lingered illogically in her fancy, long after it had been actively expelled from her reason. She thought she had lost it long ago, but in reality it had never wholly left her. Lately it had re-appeared in a new form.

It was a form to which she could not give a name, — she who had been so fluent in neat, de-

scriptive terms for the processes of her own mind.

It was a vague realization that the penalties of the faults and shortcomings of moral nature might be like those attached to the breaking of great physical laws — involved of necessity in the nature of the offence, not dealt upon the offender by some outer power.

It is an old, old thought, but it was new enough to Alice. It was like a door opened into some unknown darkness, where she groped and stumbled for an outlet to the day.

Such ideas as that the penalty of falseness of tongue might be simply perverted vision ; of treachery of act, the inability to be true ; of selfishness and cruelty, the crushing of the most pure and permanent delights, both of introspection, and of the sweet contact of what is best in one's own nature with what is best in others, — such thoughts as these came to her with the force of new discoveries, she who had been so wise.

It was thus that she came to think with terror of how it would fare with her if she were to make Harry unhappy ; how if she were to fail in those duties and responsibilities which she was soon to

assume, — duties and responsibilities which were of necessity, and still more by the natural reticence of her imagination, signs of unknown quantities, which might represent demands upon her forces impossible to fulfil.

It was thus that she came to wonder, with strange acknowledgment of her own helpless ignorance, whether there might not be something better than what she had so valued and desired, — admiration, social power, a success that other women would recognize, a life like the lives of the most brilliant and prosperous.

These things seemed to fall into insignificance in her exalted mood: she did not trust it, and she was not sure that it was exalted; but, when she thought of what she had desired, it seemed to her that there might be something better, more permanent, sweeter in the dull gray evening of one's life.

And yet this thought was light to the weight of what she must endure if she broke away from her promise to Harry, — the risk of growing old in solitude and dreariness, of making no success, of not doing what was usual for women; the prospect of teaching children, or trimming bonnets; the certainty of not being amused.

These thoughts made a circle in which she walked day after day. There was no rest, and it seemed to her there was no progress: always the same thoughts,—the fear of making Harry unhappy, the fear of penalties in and of her own nature; the thought that there might be something better than the things she had desired; the thought that she could not risk real loss or hardship for this new, faint light, which was neither conviction nor hope.

The same thoughts day after day.

There came to her no electric instants in which truth and resolve flashed in upon her mind: no outer influences swayed the balance to either side.

One of the hardest things that came to her was to tell Miss Eunice the story of the winter's changes.

Miss Eunice heard it very quietly; the few comments that she made were gentle and dry and flavorless—except one.

She said that girls often did not think seriously when they promised. It would be better if they did. "But," she added quaintly, "I shouldn't want them to be real serious; at least, not all the

time," — which placed Miss Eunice in an unexpected light.

But in spite of this, Alice could not help thinking that her aunt's attitude was in reality that of the virtuous relative who sees the ne'er-do-well of the family come to grief in earnest at last. And she acknowledged with humility, and without bitterness, that there was a great deal of truth in Miss Eunice's view.

And her thoughts went on in the same old channel, — the fear of making Harry unhappy, the fear of these new penalties, the thought of that new light, the acknowledgment of her own helpless cowardice.

She had been in Unity a long time now. The cherry boughs looked red at the core, when the wind rushed through them and showed the fruit; and the young apples showed on the tree from the sitting-room windows.

There must be an end to it at last.

She went out to the meadow-wall one evening, went over to the farther corner where it was breast-high, and stood leaning against it. The rough stones were damp, and the darkness felt damp with the river-mists.

She was falling back into an old, sentimental creed that she had heard, and despised, from other women, that in the great affairs of life love is best; if with it is not all other good, without it is none, — falling back into an old, womanly pride, that revolts at the reasonings of expediency.

There was a sense of sweetness in pausing upon these old thoughts. There was not much good in her, perhaps; but at least her nature was pure enough for a definite passion, proud enough to revolt from a mercenary marriage, faithful enough to its best to turn at last to this old, sweet creed rejected until now.

But she did not rest there.

She began to feel that her judgments of life had been the biased judgments of an ever-conscious personality, that her view of life had been the view of one who sees his own figure always in the foreground.

Slowly and with pain she began to see herself as indeed one among others; as if that principle we call a soul could stand apart, and see its poor companion and dwelling-place jostled in a crowd.

A slow progress this, a creeping and stumbling, but surely toward the light.

Some ideas came to her in the black and white garb of absolute right and absolute wrong.

It was wrong, absolutely, to assume trusts for which she had neither ignorant confidence nor intelligent strength; wrong to risk, through any fault or failure of hers, injury to another nature, above all, a sweet and sound and generous one.

It was right to turn aside, at any cost, from this risk to another, this degradation to herself.

In the chill, thick darkness by the meadow-wall, she knew what she would do.



## XVII.

"In broad daylight, and at noon,  
Yesterday I saw the moon  
Sailing high, but faint and white,  
As a schoolboy's paper kite."

LONGFELLOW.

BUT next morning it was harder.

In her first waking moments, she looked out into the blue, blue sky, and at those green tops of trees that rose in the wind and dipped again from sight.

A part of what she had resolved was renunciation; but a greater part was action, and action was hard. And there was something harder in the change that had come over her thoughts of the evening before.

It rushed over her in the moment of her first reluctant, half-conscious remembrance.

It was not a change in any of her purposes, but in the point of view from which she regarded them. She was still decided not to marry Harry

Ashley ; to go first to Celia, and tell her hard story, and to free herself as honorably as she might : but where was the visionary height of achievement that she had constructed from the making of such resolves as these ?

To break her word ; to wound these two, her truest and most generous friends !

She recognized the sense of despondency that rushed over her with additional dismay.

It was the sick and sorry feeling that comes with the morning after an escapade. Her escapades had been girlish affairs, chiefly sins against her own standard of good taste ; but she knew the feeling, and behold ! it seized upon her in this exaggerated form after her one hard, faithful effort to gain the heights.

Her struggles had been as hard as heroism ; and in these few hours the light had faded out of her resolves, and they showed white and thin and tawdry in the day, fallen from their altitude, but unchanged in their demands upon her strength.

If she could but lie there, and look into the blue, and rest, and let the world go by !

There was nothing very heroic to be done at

present ; but it was something instead of heroism to rise, and dash the cold water over her face, and to brush and coil her hair, and dress as quickly as possible.

It represented a certain amount of resolution to close the door of her room, and go down the narrow stairs.

Afterwards, whenever she recalled that day, it stood out among her thoughts as the most painful, the most consistently trying, time of her life.

It was hard from the moment when she had to explain to Miss Eunice why she came down in her travelling-dress, to the moment when she stepped out into the crowd and confusion of the great, noisy station at her journey's end.

The feeling that she had of being under a hard, tense, nervous strain was bad in itself, and worse in that it blunted no minor evils, but rather intensified them.

She was conscious that there was something a little violent and overstrained in what she was doing, just as her senses were conscious of heat and dust and noise.

There was a touch of the mock-heroic in taking a bad matter at its worst. Why could she not

have written to Harry and Celia, instead of hurrying into the great, hot city, to awkward and painful scenes which might have been avoided, and to do what was hard enough in itself, in the hardest way for all concerned?

Her perceptions were morbidly alert for the side-lights that had always teased and dazzled her: she was losing her large, clear thoughts, in petty fears that she should do what was ridiculous or violent or in false taste.

When she left the train, and came out into the street, she was trembling with excitement and fatigue and her old despondency, and with a nervous terror at being alone in the crowd and finding a cab for herself.

There was no one to meet her: not Celia nor Harry; nor Cornelius with his odd welcome of her, his eager looks at her changed beauty, and his talk of old inhabitants and the streets of New York.

Poor, false, pretentious, brilliant father! she leaned back in her cab when she found it, and cried even for him.

If she had shown some hardness in leaving him, he was avenged now.

The sun was still shining hotly, when she dismissed her cab, and ran up the steps of Celia's house. The servant who admitted her was a stranger; and she was told that Mrs. Crosby was out, and shown into the larger parlor to wait her return.

It was a handsome room; but its substantial luxuries belonged to the past season, and began to look oppressive. Alice did not know how long she waited there: it was an indefinite space of time, that might have been long or short.

At last Celia came in quickly, and wearing a street-dress.

"My dear Alice!" she said gladly, and her gladness was hard to bear.

"Don't be glad to see me," said poor Alice, starting back from her, "not until you have heard what I have to say."

"Ah! I am glad to see you, whatever you have to say," said Celia. There was something gone out of her voice. "Will you come up to my room, or your own? Why didn't you go to your room as usual?"

So she went quietly to the pleasant, familiar room that was called hers; and there was no

opportunity for explanation, until the two ladies had dined sensibly and informally by daylight.

Then they went, by tacit consent, into Celia's sitting-room.

As they went in, Celia closed the door, less as a precaution than as an opening ceremony.

It was a thoroughly painful scene, — a good woman relentless, and a just one cruel. Where is she who is generous to the woman who has wronged her son? And was not Harry as a son to Celia?

For some time Alice bore it very well: but her nature was not changed into something totally different; only illumined and in some sense controlled by a new light, — a light that was human and fallible, and that had been nearly eclipsed by the petty, vexing trials of that hard day.

At last her temper flashed out as vindictively as if there had been no change at all, —

“If you think so highly of Harry, it is a pity you do not keep him for yourself.”

An inexpressible pang of remorse and humiliation seized her, even as she spoke.

Was this the fruit of her good resolutions, —

that she should turn malicious, treacherous, unjust, under her first day of trial, and begin her search for something better, by coarsely insulting one who was (after all) her mistaken friend? She sprang across the room, somehow she flung herself down by Celia, she caught her hands whether she would or no.

“O Celia! forgive me! You know I did not mean it, — I could not. Every thing has been so hard. I have tried not to be selfish: I have thought of Harry, I have tried not to think of myself. I know what I am doing, and what I am losing; but it seemed to me — there might be something better.”

All Celia's anger had gone out under the personal thrust. She looked down at Alice, who knelt beside her in the old attitude, the old impulsiveness.

“Something better,” she said slowly. “Ah, I hope there is!” And so they were reconciled in as much as was possible.

It was well that it was so: for, in spite of all that Alice had renounced and determined, there was still before her the barren necessity of living, and if she did not mean to go back to that old

life in Unity, she must accept Celia's hospitality and help.

The first thing that she did was to seal a package made up of letters and trinkets and her heavy, brilliant ring, and send it to Harry with a brief, badly-worded note, which expressed nothing of her long struggle, or the generous and tender thoughts that had mingled with it.

She was not allowed to see him. Celia said it was better so; and, though Alice had her own opinion on the subject, she was glad to accept any offered terms of peace.

And when sentimental matters were decided, these two women, equally ignorant of what they undertook, began the weary task of finding a suitable occupation for a young lady with little slender hands that had never been trained to any thing, and quick brains furnished with a good deal of the nondescript mixture called general information, and something of the indefinite article called culture.

Alice found that cases like hers were common enough: she also found that they were very frequently and considerably discussed in the columns of dailies and periodicals.



She studied the subject from this journalistic standpoint, as well as from that of her own necessities, but was not conspicuously enlightened.

It seemed to her that the phases of the discussion had an odd faculty of reproduction. Singularly hackneyed were the barren generalizations and practical suggestions, — usually quite impracticable; singularly familiar were the arguments in favor of content with home and natural protectors, and their undeniable answer that women are not invariably provided either with natural protectors or with homes. Familiar, too, the statements of things unattainable which women attempt, and of things attainable in which they might succeed and will not.

Alice was happily free from one common source of disappointment: she had no illusions as to her talents, — she did not think she could write poems, or sing songs, or even decorate panels and clam-shells.

Her weakest trait was of quite an opposite character: she had no great faith in her capability of doing any thing.

There was a point in her favor that looked to be of considerable importance, and that was

Celia's social influence. But then, Celia had never learned to make practical use of her social influence: none of her friends desired a governess or companion,—such was the position she had hoped to secure for Alice; and, worst of all, it was now the season when every one was leaving town.

This last fact was an additional distress to Alice. The hot days caused her pangs of remorse and intolerable impatience, when she thought that she was still keeping Celia in her city-house.

Altogether it was a weary time.

One afternoon she came in, in a state of complete collapse.

“It is of no use, Celia,” she said desperately. “There is nothing I could do that is not done better by hundreds and as well by thousands of others. I had best go back to Unity, and ask aunt Eunice to train me for a housemaid—if I am not too stupid for that, even.”

“Don't go yet,” said Celia. “I have heard of something that may be to your advantage. One of my Philadelphia acquaintances called here to-day,—Mrs. Crane. She is stopping in New York on her way to some place in Maine where she

goes for the summer, and she wants a governess for her little girls."

"It is of no use," said Alice gloomily. "She will expect me to teach them Greek or algebra or Kensington-stitch, or something else I have never heard of."

"They are too young for Greek and algebra," said Celia; "and perhaps she would dispense with the Kensington-stitch."

That night Alice scarcely slept for excitement. Her highest aspirations had resolved themselves into a trembling hope that she might be considered capable of teaching Mrs. Crane's little girls.

Happily she was considered capable.

Mrs. Crane came next day,—a thin, faded woman, with a half pretty, aquiline face.

It seemed as if life could not be very hard with this neutral-colored creature, with her expression of weak amiability.

The season, that had been so great a disadvantage to Alice, was now favorable to her. Mrs. Crane was anxious to secure a governess for the little girls, and was somewhat pressed for time: an efficient young woman whom she had engaged, had disappointed her in the most shocking manner.

And now at last Celia's social influence became of value. Mrs. Crane was more than willing to conciliate Mrs. Crosby.

And so it happened that she was good enough to express herself as extremely pleased with Alice, and the matter was settled to the satisfaction of every one concerned.

Mrs. Crane was detained in New York for two or three days longer, and during that time Alice remained with Celia. It seemed to her a space in which every thing had ceased : all the old conditions of her life had passed away.

Two things happened to her in this time that were unexpected, but not remarkable.

In reading one of the morning papers, she came upon the announcement of a newly published romance by Mr. Kenneth Lawrence. She read the little printed lines with a feeling of extreme thankfulness and relief. After all, she had not turned the current of his life aside ; and she thought, with a good deal of certainty and a tinge of bitterness, that his other wrongs might be left to take care of themselves.

Her other surprise was trivial enough : the wonder was that it had not happened before. Walking

up town one afternoon, she suddenly came face to face with Harry. There was a grave, awkward recognition, and each passed on quickly; but she fancied that his glance at her frightened face was kind and sorry. Perhaps it was only a fancy, but it added another to her grateful and tender memories of his generous kindness.

The next day she went away. She was to meet Mrs. Crane at the station, and thus it happened that she left the house alone.

Celia saw the door close on her with an indefinable pang.

She turned back into her empty house with a sense of old age and desolation that she had never felt before. She had not realized how large a space in her life had been filled by those two young figures, Alice and Harry.

She sighed as she opened the library door and went in.

The room had been dismantled preparatory to closing the house and her own departure next day. The furniture was tied up in ghastly white cloths, and pushed well into the middle of the room; the pictures were dismally draped in yellow gauze.

Celia will abhor yellow gauze while she lives.

## XVIII.

"I am hard to love,  
Yet love me, — wilt thou?"

MRS. BROWNING.

EAST MARLOWE has its railway-station on a level with the grade, but at the top of a hill from the village, which lies in a veritable scoop of the land below. A bad road climbs the ascent in two irregular curves; but there is a shorter way, consisting of a steep flight of steps leading from the level below to the sky-line of the platform above.

One October afternoon, a young man left the up-train due 5.30 P.M., and, crossing the platform, glanced carelessly over the village. What he saw chiefly was the scanty grove that half covers the little green in front of the Marlowe House, and liberal glimpses of the Marlowe House itself through the thin, russet foliage.

Apparently the prospect did not interest him.

He turned back into the little dingy-brown

station, consulted a time-table, and asked a question of the telegraph-operator.

He came out in time to see the train give its backward jar, preparatory to starting, and also in time to see a figure, a young woman apparently, make a blind dash across from the top of the steps.

Half-way she was stopped by a burly young fellow standing in the centre of the platform. He released her with a blunt "Beg pardon, miss; but it couldn't be done." The train rolled on.

The young lady nodded hastily, and turned up the platform toward the new arrival.

She wore rather a thick gauze veil; but, in spite of this, he thought he recognized her, and thought it with a very considerable degree of surprise. He raised his hat, and said doubtfully, "Miss Dinsmore?"

She pushed her veil up with a trembling hand, and showed a pale face, and a forced smile under it. Finally she held the unsteady hand out to him, and said, "How do you do, Harry?"

It was an awkward meeting, but not as bad as it might have been.

"You see I have lost my train," said Alice.

"That is very annoying," said Harry. Pause. "I hope it doesn't inconvenience you seriously?"

"I am separated from the rest of my party by the means."

"Why, that is bad luck," said Harry. "Can I be of any assistance to you?"

"I don't know," said Alice, raising her eyes with rather an anxious expression in them. "I want to go to Boston to-night, if I can. We were to take the express at Broxton, and now I suppose I have missed the connection. If you will find out whether there is a later train that I can take, and whether I can make it from here? I always get more or less mixed over time-tables."

"Will you come in while I inquire?" said Harry.

"I would rather not. I hate the inside of railway-stations."

As he went into the station, she watched him with a strange little feeling. It was a sense of amusement that had a sting about it somewhere: she was not sure where.

So this was what became of would-be-dramatic situations. She made a headlong dash at a moving train, and was stopped by the wrong man,



not an actor in the comedy at all. (This outsider was looking at her from below, at her slim young figure distinct against the sky.) She came upon her ill-treated lover, and sent him to overlook time-tables. Climax most peaceful and commonplace!

Harry came back, wearing a worried expression. He had one of those adaptable young faces that take on the look of care earnestly, and shake it off lightly, exactly as their possessors take the measles, or love, or a popular excitement.

"I'm afraid you can't do it," he said. "6.10 is the train you have missed. 7.40 is a through train, doesn't stop at Broxton; and there's no other before nine o'clock."

"Ah! then I must wait over until morning."

"Is that very awkward for you?"

"Oh, no! it does not matter. I can join Mrs. Crane to-morrow. She will not leave Boston before the next day."

Harry looked abstracted. He was balancing the relative merits of ceremonious and colloquial phrases. Finally he said, "May I walk over to the hotel with you?"

Alice looked up at him reproachfully, and then

colored high, and looked down, thinking the reproachful look in questionable taste.

They felt that they had escaped stumbling upon something awkward: at first, they were not sure that they had escaped.

"Shall we go down by the road?" said Alice.

As they walked down into the abrupt valley, she felt the naturalness of walking with him, and the strangeness of their imperfectly renewed intimacy.

The road was bordered with blackberry-vines, and the vines were covered with black, withered leaves. After a long summer, a severe frost had blackened and shrivelled the foliage that was everywhere unusually full.

The little grove at the foot of the hill was a melancholy spectacle.

"See those trees," said Alice. "The foliage looks like the foliage of stereoscopic views."

"When I was a little fellow, people used to insist on amusing children with stereoscopes," said Harry. "I wonder whether they do now."

"They used to show them to me," said Alice vaguely. "How I hated them!"

Harry laughed a little. "Why didn't you hate the people?"

"I mean the people," said Alice. "I thought they were horribly stupid: I think so still."

By this time, they were down in the little grove.

It was a scene that seemed to belong to no known season. The brown and shrunk leaves hung thick upon the trees, the blue sky was soft, and the air dry and mild. It suggested that this was an early June day, and that nature had suddenly died.

In the middle of the grove was a little fountain, — a cheap, tawdry affair, that had fallen into complete shabbiness without the excuse of age. Its basin was marvellously battered; its stream, half-choked at the orifice, sprang into the air at an absurd angle, and fell back with a feeble, inefficient little splash.

The face of the Marlowe House showed plainer from here. It was of a deep cream-color, and looked as unpleasantly new as the fountain looked prematurely old.

"How ugly every thing is!" said Alice suddenly, coming to a stop beside the fountain. "Why don't you ask me how I happened to miss that train?"

"That is one of the questions it is never safe

to ask," said Harry. "I haven't asked a question like that since I was a very small boy."

Alice laughed ; though Harry evidently did not expect such a response to his little pleasantry, if it were intended as a pleasantry. He had launched it from the other side of the basin with rather a melancholy face.

"This was not exactly my fault," said Alice. "Mrs. Crane is always leaving something behind her. This time she left an opal ring : did you ever notice the queer faculty opals have of getting lost or mislaid ? I thought I had time to go back for it, but it seems I had not."

"And it seems that Mrs. Crane went on," said Harry.

"That was natural enough," said Alice. "I dare say she is having the worst of it, travelling alone with the children."

They stood for some moments longer by the fountain, exchanging other commonplaces ; and again for a little space in the entrance of the Marlowe House, when they had crossed the sandy road and the dusty lawn and the empty piazza, and Alice had sent for the key of her room.

They parted with a certain sense of relief.

There was a sort of punctiliousness underneath the apparent freedom of their intercourse.

The room that Alice came back to, had for her just that mingling of strangeness and familiarity that results from a brief occupancy, and a return after a briefer absence.

It had an appearance of smartness which may have been caused by some frank touches of color in the panels of the door, and in the moulding elsewhere, and by the fact that its side curved into the bay-window which ran up the side of the Marlowe House.

After taking off her hat and wrap, she drew a chair into the window, and opened the side case-ment looking toward the road.

The prospect was meagre. To the right, the road disappeared around a wooded curve: to the left, a possible view was cut off by the hotel piazza. By leaning out, and a little to one side, she could see a glimpse, a little triangle, of its interior. In front of her window was the nearest tree of the grove,—a pine that was dying, not of winter, but of some blight which had turned its fine, strong needles yellow.

She felt intolerably lonely and melancholy.

Upon a reasonable view, there was nothing more than inconvenience in the fact that she had missed her train, and was detained at Marlowe another night, and nothing more than a certain amount of awkwardness in her meeting with Harry; but these things, or something else,—perhaps it was only a whim,—had sent her spirits down to the lowest ebb.

While she sat there, the light was dying. By and by it was twilight. The pine lost its sickly tinge, and sank into the dimness; the white road glimmered: nothing showed distinctly.

She felt unreasonably nervous and timid and deserted. No, not quite deserted, while she was under the same roof with Harry.

She fell to thinking of him in that pleasant summer-time that seemed so long ago. How blue his eyes were! How, when he was pleased, he would say “Ah!” with the upward inflection; and how, when he was quite in earnest, he would scowl thoughtfully, but not at all unpleasantly!

It seemed to her that until now she had never thought of the strangeness of the meetings and partings of this world.

You meet your enemy, and you talk amiably

of the weather, and each other's travels and fortunes; and you part from your friend in like easy fashion, and yet you see him no more, not that a fate or a tragedy comes between, but that the common chances of life take you in one direction and him in another.

Alice made a great many little trite reflections in those days. There were blanks in her experience that had to be filled with the knowledge of things it was only wonderful she had not known long ago. She had to accept a great many little hard grains of commonplace with the rest of her newly acquired wisdom, if it could be called wisdom.

Her generalities dwindled and clung dismally around the thoughts of her meeting with Harry when she had thought they were so finally and effectually parted.

She indulged the gratuitous assumption that they would not meet again for years, perhaps not until both had grown old. And with all the advance she had made, and all the philosophy she could summon, she could not bring herself to think that any thing would be productive of much satisfaction when she was an old woman.

By this time the light outside had changed again. Somewhere the moon was rising. Alice could not see it; it was behind her as she sat: but she saw the gray dimness that had covered the world of sickly, dying colors melt into a clear, increasing light; finally it gave way to an austere splendor of white-and-black.

Where there were shadows, they seemed to lie in black masses like some dense substance. The grass that bordered the road showed black: the road itself looked like a light ribbon, most like in that its edge was so sharply defined. The pine grew into sight, distinct yet somehow spectral, less an actual tree than its sign, as that pale brightness was the sign of another light. That little triangle of the piazza-floor showed absolutely white and brilliant, cut sharply from the diagonal shadow.

As Alice watched, a figure came into this little lighted space. She recognized Harry at once.

He came out to the edge of the piazza, made a slow turn, and walked back into the shadow, and out of view under the roof. In a moment he came back again, and this was repeated several times. It was all that was visible of his walk up and down the piazza.



Presently he came to a standstill in the moonlit space. Alice still watched him, feeling a gentle, soothing melancholy as she looked. He was standing exactly as he stood the day she watched him through Celia's garden-gate.

It was wonderful how like her feeling was to the feeling she had in that far-off time. Now, as then, the important element in it was that honest, affectionate liking for Harry.

This pleasant minor sentiment seemed to have a great degree of vitality. It was incredible, the changes of feeling it had survived.

As she watched him, she had a certain content in thinking that he probably made less of the situation than she did. This was not based upon any sort of superciliousness, although it had its root in her knowledge of the limitations of his nature.

Her pleasure lay partly in the memory of how ingenuously he had acknowledged his bounds, how frankly and shrewdly he had declined to go beyond them, and how they had seemed the guardians of his sensible, cheery simplicity; and partly in recognizing any trait of her friend's, merely because it was his.

She leaned there for some time with her cheek

on her palm, and the top of her head against the window-frame. She felt secure in the darkness, and peaceful in her reflections.

Suddenly she was roused by a thought as startling as a blow in the face. She actually felt her cheeks grow hot in the mild, soft air.

She had suddenly remembered that she had not gone down to supper, and it instantly followed that Harry would think she had remained away for the purpose of avoiding him.

She sprang up, smarting under the acknowledgment of her stupid, careless blunder. The situation had been left in her hands for the exercise of delicacy, of tact, of common humanity, she told herself with a woman's exaggeration; and this was what she had done with it. She had thought Harry did not make the most of the situation. She had made the most of it in one sense, at least, in the most intolerable sense, — she had made the most of it to annoy and vex and wound Harry in this last meeting of their lives. The sense of this, and of his nearness, and of the impossibility of his ever being so near again, was so strong that she leaned out of the window, and called to him, "Harry! O Harry!"

She shrank back into the darkness. "I suppose I meant to *shout* my explanation from the window," she said, in strong disgust. "Now I shall have to go down to him." She was more like the old Alice of swift changes and unsparing self-ridicule than she had been for many months.

She was out of her room before she thought of the possible embarrassment of finding any one else on the piazza.

Happily there was no one else on the piazza. Harry was still standing in the moonlight, and still looking up for the origin of the call.

He started nervously when she touched his sleeve.

"You *here*? Why—I beg your pardon," he added, recovering himself; "but I was sure you called me from above—a moment ago."

"So I did," said Alice; "but—I came down—I wanted to tell you, to explain. I did not come down to supper because"—

Harry's eyes fell: he looked at the piazza-floor.

Alice burst out desperately, "Because—oh! because I was not hungry: I forgot the time, and"—

It certainly was not a fluent explanation. She

could have laughed and cried in hysterical rage and distress at the pitiful absurdity of it.

As had happened before, the advantage lay with Harry's directness. He took it.

"I think I understand," he said hesitatingly. "You mean, perhaps—that you didn't mean to avoid me?" He was looking at her again.

"Yes," said Alice, with a kind of helpless relief, and raising her eyes to his. "That is it. I am glad you can understand: it is not at all to my credit that you do."

"If you had not come down I should not understand." They were looking away from each other once more. "It is very kind. I appreciate it—truly."

"I must go in," said Alice, beginning to walk away.

"Won't you stay a while?" asked Harry. "If you would take a turn up and down the piazza; or, why shouldn't we go over in the grove?"

Alice felt an exaggerated flash of self-contempt. What was that nonsense about limitations? He saw at once the way to prove that he understood her was to presume a little upon her favor.

"I *would* like to go over there," she said im-

pulsively, coming back again. She stood as if ready to go.

Harry looked down at her doubtfully. "It is warm, but" —

"But people usually wear hats," said Alice, putting her hand up to her uncovered head. "Why, so they do! I had forgotten mine." She laughed, her own fresh laugh, and fairly ran into the house. Harry winced at that, for the first time.

She came out again, wearing a hat, but no wrap or gloves. He was standing at the door.

They crossed the piazza, and went down the steps.

"Will you take my arm?" said Harry. She hesitated, without meaning to do so.

At that moment she trod on a broken plank in the walk: it tilted unexpectedly, and flung her against his side. He drew her hand through his arm without further comment.

When they came to the little fountain, it looked quite rustic and venerable in the moonlight. By daylight it was only provincial and shabby.

The illusion of the season was now almost complete: except that the fallen leaves rustled so under foot, it was a summer evening.

Alice half-knelt, half-crouched beside the basin ; keeping one hand on its edge, while with the other she picked up dry leaves, and set them afloat on the water.

"Do you know this was meant to be a grand park?" she asked.

"Then, it is far enough off the intention," said Harry.

Alice set more leaves afloat. When she stooped to one side to gather them, the slender hand that remained on the basin's edge showed above her head. "It was to be a part of the grounds of the Marlowe House. The Marlowe House was to have very large grounds."

Harry did not manifest any particular interest ; and, after a pause, Alice went on, "It is only fifteen years or so since the railroad came here, you know. At that time there was a rich man here. His name was Marlowe : the village was re-named for him. It seems he left here when he was a boy, and came back very rich a great many years after, like the old-fashioned stories. (By the by, I wonder how many years it is since any one has written a story like that?) And then he gave the town a library, and re-built the schoolhouse,

and helped the churches, I believe. Finally they changed the Indian name of the village for his. Then the railroad came. By this time he was quite old ; and I suppose he must have lost the shrewdness or foresight, or whatever it was, that had made his fortune, for he somehow got the idea that Marlowe could be made a grand fashionable summer resort. Of course that is what he called it. To be sure, there is a fine summer climate here, and there are pleasant drives, and a lake, and a little cave : but it is not enough ; people don't come. So he built the Marlowe House ; and, before it was finished, he had a telegram one morning, and dropped like a dead man when he had read it ; and very soon it was known that he had lost as much of his fortune as he had given away before, and that was a great deal. But he was not dead ; and he got up, and finished the Marlowe House, though he had to give up the grounds and gardens he had planned for it. I don't think they would have been very handsome ; for he had his own way in building the hotel, and I never saw any thing much uglier. And, after it was finished, the people never came ; and he lost more and more heavily. At last he gave up

the hotel, but not soon enough. It swamps every one, they say: some one has been losing there ever since. And, by this time, he seemed to have lost all his good luck, or good sense, whichever it was: he was always speculating, and always growing poorer, until at last he had nothing to venture. Before he died, he came to the charity of some relatives of his. They were children of a man who had never liked or believed in him—not even that he was honest. Now, isn't that melancholy? Why, isn't it a tragedy? Some one told me the story when we first came here, and I have never been able to get it out of my mind."

The fountain made two or three of its feeble little splashes audible. Alice had been talking so steadily that they had not noticed it before.

"Alice, is this the way these people treat you?" said Harry abruptly.

Alice looked up from her floating leaves with a start. Her hat was pushed back from her face, and her hair was pushed back also: the little soft, thick locks were half uncurled.

"Is that what you've been thinking of all this time? I don't suppose you have heard any thing



I've said," she said kindly. "If it is the way they treat me, it is not at all a bad way. You can't reasonably expect Mrs. Crane to look after me, as if I were her daughter or her younger sister. Besides, if you knew Mrs. Crane, you would know, that, if she thought any thing when she took that train this afternoon, she thought I could rejoin her at Broxton. I dare say she is much more distressed about it than I am. The separation is really worse for her—more inconvenient."

Pause, in which the fountain made other weak-minded splashes.

"She really is a very good, well-meaning woman, Harry; and I am very—fortunate. I am not in the least badly treated, or even neglected. I can't possibly pose as an ill-used governess."

"Don't you find that water cold?" said Harry.

"Perhaps I do," said Alice. She stood up submissively, and wrung her hands together. Her handkerchief was naturally in the pocket of her dress: this was hidden under some flounce, or fold of drapery, and her chilled fingers refused to find it.

Harry produced a silk handkerchief, and, quietly

taking her small, cold hands between his own, dried them in its soft folds.

"There is the advantage of having more than one pocket," he said. For the moment he had completely recovered his pleasant fraternal manner, that she had trusted more entirely than any other regard she had ever received.

She looked up at him with a kind of timid pleasure that made her eyes very sweet. They were always large eyes ; but now she had grown somewhat thinner, and this made their size slightly noticeable.

After standing by the fountain a little longer, they went and sat down on a melancholy and disappointed-looking rustic seat that faced it.

Doubtless this bench had represented to the unfortunate Marlowe many of its kind overflowing with beauty and fashion.

"When have you seen Celia Crosby?" asked Alice.

"I saw her in New York a week ago," said Harry.

"Ah ! she has returned to the city, then. Sometimes she likes to stay out of town so late in the season."

"She closed the cottage, and went back a month ago. Do you remember Mrs. Winters?"

"Oh, yes!"

"She is with Mrs. Crosby now. I think it is on her account that Mrs. Crosby returned to town so early : she has been quite ill."

"I am sorry for that," said Alice. She added thoughtfully, "Celia must always be taking care of some one."

"But I shouldn't say that Mrs. Winters could fill your place," said Harry, with his unexpected talent for answering thoughts. He instantly realized that it would have been better not to speak, but it was too late.

Alice did not answer at once. Among the most frequent flaws in her wisdom were the illogical self-reproaches to which she had lately subjected herself. Against reason though it was, she could not always rid herself of the thought that she had deserted Celia ; and the image of her friend lonely, and tending an unfortunate but still uncongenial invalid, brought something into her throat that half choked her when she tried to speak. By and by she got rid of this feeling, or suppressed it at all events, and went on, —

"Have you ever felt—I don't suppose you have, and it's a stupid way to feel—but has it ever seemed to you that some sort of dreariness—unhappiness—was falling upon all your friends?—a kind of general wretchedness seizing upon one after another until the world was full of it?"

"I don't know that I ever thought of that," said Harry gently. It was pretty, the regard he had for her opinions, whether they were beyond his own simple philosophy, or outside of it by what he considered a woman's foolishness. "I suppose I know, in a general way, that the world, the large world, *is* full of unhappiness; and, when any special case comes to my knowledge, I say there is a poor fellow getting his share of it."

Alice suddenly made a little stifled sound that she had tried in vain to suppress. Something in what Harry had said—perhaps it was the allusion to the large world—had quite finished her self-control.

"Alice!" said Harry. "Have I"—

"No, you haven't," said Alice. "I—oh! I am ashamed; but I knew I should go on in this way when I lost that train. There is no reason

for it. I never was more consistently cheerful in my life."

"Oh! evidently," said poor Harry, with desperate, unskilled sarcasm. He was so miserable he positively could not help it.

He got up, and walked about restlessly. The fountain splashed as weakly as ever.

After a time, Alice put her handkerchief away, and stood up.

"Shall we go back?" said Harry. "I—well, I can't stand this any longer without making a fool of myself. I don't propose to annoy you in that way if I can help it. Oh! don't suppose I intended to inflict any thing of this sort upon you. Don't you think I am man enough to bear what I must, and lose what I must, and not whine about it? But when I see you"—

Alice said something about "Harry, best, kindest friend."

She was trembling so that she put one hand on the arm of the bench.

"Oh! *friend!*" said the young man. "What do you think I care about that? Where is the use of it? I am of no use to you. I can do nothing for you. When I see you alone, left to

yourself, and having the worst of it,—for you are having the worst of it,—I might as well be your enemy.”

“We can’t have any thing over again,” said Alice stupidly.

That stopped him. Somehow he had both of her hands. “Do you know what you said?” he said excitedly. “Do you mean it? *Can* we have any thing over again?”

“O Harry!” said Alice, “surely I didn’t say that!”

“No, no. You said—oh! never mind what you said. My darling”—

Alice said “O Harry!” again, and in such a tone of distress that he let her go. He thought that was all he should ever be able to do for her, that it was all over.

But she did not go very far.

She sat down on the bench once more, and hid her face in her hands.

“It is too soon,” she said in a half-whisper.

Harry came a little nearer. He was fairly puzzled; but a delicious light was breaking in upon him, though he could scarcely trust it yet.

“O Harry, it is so much too soon!”

It was her very last objection ; and it was easy to overcome, like any right-minded obstacle at the end of the story.

There was one thing the thought of which neither Alice nor Harry could endure ; and that was a repetition, or the semblance of a repetition, of the scenes of their former engagement.

They shrank with one impulse from a return to New York, from the familiar rooms of Celia's house, and even from Celia's friendliness and guardianship.

Also a long engagement was unnecessary, and, to a certain extent, impracticable.

If Harry followed Alice to Philadelphia, he could scarcely conduct the most reticent love-making without inconvenience to Mrs. Crane and the little girls ; and Alice felt that an entire separation was a trial of his patience that she had no right to inflict.

So, when he did follow her to Philadelphia, she was persuaded to grant the wish he came to urge ; and, before the fortunate days of October were gone, they were quietly married.

Mrs. Crane amply justified Alice's praises.

Though again fated to lose her governess, she behaved with the greatest amiability and friendliness. They were married in her pleasant parlor.

Alice had one prominent thought on her wedding-day that she could not well share with Harry. She thought, and all her old affection returned in thinking, "Now, Celia has her heart's desire."

Before they left the city next day, she wrote her a long letter. Among other things, she wrote:—

"I know that I have failed in what I meant to do, though now I am not always sure what that was; but I cannot believe that my thoughts, or my attempts, are, or will be, useless to me. What I most wished to avoid was, entanglement with the lives of others. Somewhere in my blood, or my brain, I have a great fear of assuming trusts for which I am not fit: but now the sense of responsibility has slipped from me; or, if it has not, I see that wherever I go, and whatever I do, I must entangle myself with other lives, and, if I cannot avoid this, I would rather submit to it in the old way. There is no denying that I am glad it *is* the old way, and that I am doing what is usual for women."

But when Alice read this fragmentary confession, she became dissatisfied with it, and finally



tore the letter across. She wrote a shorter one, and signed, for the first time, "Alice Ashley."

The principal reason for her act was a conviction, that, if her mind wandered in depths or shallows uncongenial to her husband, she had best admit no companion to her reflections.

Finally this took the practical form of a determination to seek no confidant for the thoughts she could not share with Harry. This is a tolerably exalted resolution; but, as Alice does not take that view of it, it has at least a chance of being successfully kept.

Though she has left her fears, she has not left their lessons, nor forgotten the possibilities that they opened before her.

She is not sure whether it was in the months of separation, or in the moment of meeting, that she reached the certainty of her power to make Harry happy. It is enough that she has reached it. It is the security in which she rests, and the ground on which her aspirations are built. And it is at the root of the cheerful courage with which she hopes to meet all other duties and responsibilities of life.

Thus Celia had her heart's desire. But the first knowledge of it threw her into some embarrassment.

In the first place, she had to tell Mrs. Winters, who was now recovering, and was thinner, browner, and more restless than ever. She listened, and looked at Celia sharply with her bright eyes.

"I suppose it is very fortunate and suitable from any point of view but mine," she said. "But, all the same, it is a surrender."

Celia took this down-stairs to think of.

She sat down before the library-fire, — a beautiful wood-fire, solid and blazing on a ruddy bed of coals below.

On top was a little fairy cylinder, black fret-work without, all glowing within.

"Yes, it is a surrender: but it is a surrender in act, to one of the most loyal and generous among men; in theory, to impulses that grow stronger, and gather sweetness in their strength, with every year of a woman's life.

"This time I am not responsible. That ought to console me, if I needed consolation.

"Surely I am a most unreasonable woman. Ah!

‘Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?’

“I shall be very glad to see their young faces when they come back again.”

Here the little fairy cylinder rolled from the top of the fire. Breaking in its fall, it sent up two scarlet flashes, then crumbled, glowing, into the red coals beneath.



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